



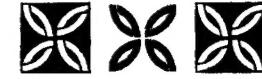
Early Tamils  
OF  
Lanka ---- Ilankai

(FROM EARLIEST TIMES  
TO  
CIRCA 10TH CENTURY)

N. PARAMESWARAN

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First Edition: January 1999.

Second Edition (revised): October 2000.

Cover and Art Design by Nandhini

Printed by:

DMJ Printers,  
No. 30-1, Jalan Vivekananda, Off Jalan Tun Sambandan  
50470 Kuala Lumpur.  
Malaysia.



## FOREWORD

It gives me much pleasure to write the foreword for this book written by my old friend and classmate, Mr. N. Parameswaran. History is a fascinating subject. Unfortunately it is also true that history is easily distorted and misinterpreted and also misunderstood. Myths can gradually assume the form of facts and whole generations of people may believe these myths for historical truth. Mr. Parameswaran's book is therefore a welcome contribution to the cause of historical truth.

I am impressed by the effort that the author has taken to delve deeply into the available written records as well as tangible evidence such as archaeological remains, epigraphical sources and geographical features. He has not confined his attention to the Jaffna Peninsula nor the island of Sri Lanka but has also gone into early South Indian history, usually identified with the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas. Some of the material the author presents is inevitably a little technical but his conclusions based on cogent evidence are convincing. He has dealt not only with political developments and conflicts but also with the socio-cultural history of the Tamils and other peoples. There are references to the religious beliefs, creative arts and linguistic characteristics of the Tamils in particular.

I feel that the author should continue from where he left off and bring the history up-to-date. I have no doubt the book will be read by numerous individuals besides the Tamil readership to whom it should be of absorbing interest. I understand that this book is his maiden effort at writing. Therefore, in congratulating him on a job well done, I also urged him to continue writing.

Petaling Jaya, Malaysia.  
20 August 2000

John Doraisamy

(iii)

(ii)



## PREFACE

In this book, the history of the early Tamils of Lanka=Ilankai is traced from pre-historic times to about the 10th century. The early history of the Tamils shows the extent of Dravidian and Tamil penetration and settlement of the island from pre-historic and early historic times. It leads to the influential role played by the Tamils in the commercial, cultural, political and military affairs of the island during this period.

South India exerted profound and enduring influences on Lanka=Ilankai from ancient times. Hence a study of those times are better understood in the wider geo-political context of the South Indian mainland and Lanka=Ilankai. From the time the Tamils gained mastery over South India, establishing their kingdoms, they began to influence the course of the island's history. Additionally South Indian traditional and historical materials can be drawn upon to supplement local source materials and foreign accounts and provide independent corroboration.

In the process, as is seen, some myths and misrepresentations in the recorded traditional histories of Lanka are demystified to arrive at the truth. The following quote is most pertinent in this regard.

*"The greatest enemy of the truth is very often not the lie, deliberate, contrived and dishonest but the myth -- persistent, persuasive and unrealistic."*

*John F. Kennedy*

By "re-righting" the traditional accounts, a less biased and more balanced interpretation of the early history of the Tamils in the island emerges based on ascertainable historical evidence.

The ancestors of the vast majority of the Sri Lankans of today are of Indian origin. Almost all of them have come to the island from the southern parts of India. These peoples have thus started out from a common ethnic and cultural base in the distant past. However, in time, a pluralistic society emerged with differences in religion, language and culture giving rise to separate identities.

(iv)

The Tamils however to this day share a common religion, language and culture with the Tamils of South India, though having evolved since a distinctive subset of that culture. A proper and in-depth understanding of the early history of the Tamils of Lanka=Ilankai is essential particularly to a Sri Lankan Tamil community which is at present dispersed and growing up abroad. It needs to be aware, more so, that it is heir to a rich Tamil heritage.

This book cannot claim to say anything new or original on the subject. It however draws from different and diverse sources to seek to establish and present the facts based on historical evidence. Its main object is to trace the ancient history of the Tamils of Lanka=Ilankai from a broader Tamil perspective overlooking both Ilankai and South India. In the process, it disproves the misrepresentations about some of the things which continue to be said and believed on the subject. As may be observed, Sri Lanka is referred to in the book as Lanka or Ilankai as it was called in ancient times.

I wish to thank a few of my friends who helped in reading through the manuscript and making valuable suggestions.

January 1999.

N. Parameswaran

## PREFACE TO SECOND REPRINT

The Second Reprint carries a Foreword from my old friend John Doraisamy, ex- Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Malaysia. There are a few minor corrections and some additions to the text. Additions have been drawn from papers presented at a seminar in Colombo organised by the Social Scientists Association in December 1979. An important addition is particularly to Chapter X and relates to the northern kingdom. There is an appendix included on "The Demise of the Aryan Race/InvasionTheories?" based on the new evidence coming from the recent excavations of the Indus Valley sites. As seen, this has significant implications for the ancient /early histories of India and Lanka. In this connection, a Note is included as an appendix on "interpretations" of Lanka's ancient past. In Sri Lanka's case, it underlines the need by its historians to revisit the the pre-historic period and focuss on early settlements and ethnic formations in any in-depth study of the historical beginnings of its peoples.

October 2000

N. Parameswaran

(v)



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## INTRODUCTION

Dedicated  
to the affectionate memory of my parents

(viii)

From very early times, the Sri Lanka of today was known to the Tamil people both here and in South India as Ilankai ( இலங்கை ) and / or Elam ( Ilam ) ( ஏலம் ). Ilankai is the Tamil equivalent of Lanka; in fact Lanka is the Sanskrit form derived from the Tamil Ilankai and bestowed upon the island by Indian tradition. The Ramayana by Valmiki, one of the celebrated epics of India, (the other being the Mahabharata ) pits Rama, the hero of the Ramayana against Ravana, the king of Lanka. Much of the ancient Lanka, the kingdom of Ravana has been submerged in a deluge and now lies below the ocean. Charles Pridham appears convinced that "the names of many places of Ceylon afford support to the histories of the Ramayana".<sup>1</sup> The name Ilankai is yet used as the officially recognised Tamil equivalent for Sri Lanka. Elam was the name given to the island by the Tamils of South India both in the spoken word as well as in ancient Tamil literature.

To the Sinhalese, Sri Lanka was first known as Tambapanni as referred to in the Pali Chronicles of Lanka. The Chronicles however more often and generally referred to it as Lanka and sometimes as Lankadipa (Island of Lanka). The island came to be called later in the 5th century by Buddhist writers at times as Simhaladipa or Sinhaladipa ( the island of the Sinhalas). Under British rule, it was officially known as Ceylon. Following independence from the British in 1948 and with the inauguration of the country as a republic in 1972, it reverted to Lanka, with the honorific "Sri" added on. Thus it has come to call itself today as Sri Lanka, meaning the Resplendent Isle.

The Tamil and Sinhala peoples have occupied the island for over 2500 years. The beginnings of the Sinhalese are traced to the mythical , Vijaya, the founding father of the Sinhala race, to sometime in the fifth century BC. The date of Vijaya's arrival in the island is made to synchronise with the date of the passing away ( parinibbana ) of the Buddha. It was put down as 483 BC until the 15th century, when on revision of the Buddhist calender, it is now taken to be 543 BC.

The Tamils, now known as the Sri Lankan Tamils, had occupied the island much earlier coming in as peaceful immigrants, colonists and traders. They established agricultural settlements in the north-west and south-east parts and trading settlements in and around the seaport towns of the island. It is with these early Tamil settlements as well as the occupation of the island by the pre-historic Dravidian tribes and peoples such as the Rakshasas, Yakshas (Yakkas) and Nagas that a reconstruction of the early history of the Tamils of Lanka=Ilankai must begin.

At a much later period in medieval times between the 10th to 13th centuries onwards came the Arab traders whose descendants the Moors constitute the third major ingredient in the ethnic make-up of the Island. During the European occupation of the country from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards came other minor groups such as the Malays who were brought to the island mainly as mercenaries by the Dutch; the Burghers were descendants of Portuguese and Dutch settlers. More importantly, Tamil indentured labour from South India was brought by the British to work the tea and rubber plantations. These latter day Tamils are generally referred to as Indian Tamils.

According to the last all-island Population Census, of Sri Lanka taken in 1981, the racial make-up of the Island's population was as follows:

1981		
	(in millions)	per cent
Sinhalese ( Low country and Kandyans )	10.98	73.95
Sri Lankan Tamils	1.88	12.70
Sri Lankan Moors	1.05	7.05
Indian Tamils	0.82	5.52
Others	0.11	0.76
Total	14.84	100.00

The total population of Sri Lanka was estimated to be 18.1 million in 1995. It is estimated to be around 19.5 million today.

It is self-evident that the early Tamils, like those during British rule, came to the Island from South India, which is just 30 miles across the Palk Strait. Besides there is even today a Tamil State in the Republic of India, Tamil

Nadu where Tamil is the language of the people. The Tamils of Sri Lanka share a common language, religion and culture with the Tamils of South India. Based on this commonality, the Tamils of Sri Lanka have evolved for themselves a distinctive subset of that culture. The Tamils in the island pride themselves on speaking a pure Tamil (Sentamil). It was remarked recently by no less a person than Kalaingar M. Karunanidhi<sup>4</sup> that it is only in Ilankai that the Tamil of Tolkapiam is yet spoken; not so even in Tamil Nadu. Again the Tamils of the island from ancient times worshipped the Almighty Siva and the members of His family Sakti, Ganesha and Murukan. There is ample evidence to show that most of the celebrated Hindu temples in Ilankai, as mentioned by C.S.Navaratnam, have followed the injunctions of the Saiva Agamas in the construction of temples and religious edifices and in the performance of religious rites and ceremonies. In this instance too, unlike in Tamil Nadu where Saiva and Vaishnava sects equally contend, here in the island amongst the Hindus, the Saiva tradition prevails and is scrupulously observed. The Tamils in the island have produced renowned men in Saiva Siddhanta lore. Among them, Sri Arumuga Navalar stands in a class by himself. Again while the Tamil literary traditions of South India have had an impact on the Tamil-speaking people of Ilankai, the contributions of Tamil savants, scholars, poets and writers of Ilankai from the Sangam period onwards to the formation of that literature and its literary and critical traditions are noteworthy. At the same time, it is significant to observe, as pointed out by Dr Kailasapathy, that the Tamil people of Ilankai have been able to develop an autonomous literature that relates to but is not subordinate to the Tamil literature of South India.

Though the Sinhalese are said to have come from the northern part of India, there is no certainty as to the exact place in India from which they came. Dr G.C. Mendis posed the problem thus when he wrote as follows: "One way to fix their Indian habitat is to find out to which ancient Indian language old Sinhalese is most closely allied, but so far the study of ancient Indian dialects and of Sinhalese has not been advanced sufficiently for us to draw any definite conclusions"<sup>5</sup>. If the Sinhalese language was brought to the Island by the mythical Vijaya from India, there is no trace whatsoever of that language in India either now or in the past. The fact is that the Sinhalese language is today only spoken in Sri Lanka. It is therefore clear that it was a language that evolved in this country amongst the people, drawing no doubt from the other languages with which it came into contact. As with the language, so

with the people, a Sinhala ethnic identity emerged from the early settlers in the Island over a period of time.

As for the Moors of Sri Lanka, they too came largely from the Malabar and Coromandel coasts of South India where initially the Arab traders made settlements and inter-married with the local populace. This gave rise to a South Indian Muslim community which inherited some of their (South Indian) cultural values including Tamil as its mother tongue. According to some Muslim writers, this explains the integration of some Hindu practices (such as the giving of dowries and the tying of the thali in marriages) into Muslim life-styles. As observed by S.Arasaratnam, "In the marriage ceremony, many aspects of a Hindu marriage were taken over. Bedecking the bridegroom with jewels and the "alatti" ceremony of blessing the couple...were practised by the Muslims". Again purdah was less rigorously practiced and the women were comparatively freer than in other orthodox Muslim societies. Hence when eventually the Muslims made trading settlements and inroads into the island, they came mainly from South India. As S.Pathmanathan says, "a very large number of them are, however, descendants of traders from Malabar and the Coromandel and are therefore Tamil speaking".( It may be mentioned here that the Muslims of northern India are on the otherhand essentially Urdu-speaking.) This accounts for the fact that to this day, Tamil is essentially their mother tongue and they remain largely a Tamil-speaking people. Many of them are proud to claim Tamil as their mother tongue and not a few have made significant contributions to Tamil language and literature.

The break-up of the Island according to religions is as follows based on the last Census in 1981.

1981		
	(in thousands)	per cent
All religions	14,846.7	100.00
Buddhists	10,288.3	69.30
Hindus	2,297.8	15.48
Roman Catholics & other Christians	1,130.6	7.61
Muslims	1,121.7	7.55
Other	8.3	0.06

The Sinhalese are mainly Buddhists. The Tamils – both the Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils - are mainly Hindus. A small percentage among the Sinhalese and Tamils became Christians with the coming of the Europeans. The Muslims as the name implies are followers of Islam. Hinduism and Buddhism were introduced to the Island from very early times from India. They remained the only religions of the Tamils and Sinhalese respectively until the arrival of the Europeans. The early Tamil settlers from pre-historic times were Hindus. As mentioned earlier, the Saiva tradition of Hinduism prevails in the island. Buddhism was brought to the island during the reign of King Devanampiya Tissa (247-207 BC). It soon spread to become the dominant religion. It is the Theravada branch of Buddhism that prevails in the country. But Hinduism and Buddhism co-existed in ancient times in Lanka. There are sacred sites common to both religions dating back from early times. This is not surprising as Buddhism grew out of Hinduism and developed in a Hindu environment in India and Sri Lanka. The guardian deities of Buddhism in the island are Hindu gods and goddesses. Islam came to the Island with the Moor traders. Though Tamil-speaking, they have retained their separate identity as followers of Islam. A minor group, the Malays - brought by the Dutch as mercenaries - are also followers of Islam. Christianity came to the Island with the Europeans; the Portuguese introduced Catholicism and the Dutch and British, Protestantism. Their adherents are found among the Sinhalese and Tamils, as mentioned earlier.

Ethnic composition of the population of Sri Lanka

Province	Total	Sinhalese	Sri Lankan Tamils	Indian Tamils	Moors	Others
Northern	1,109,404	3.2	86.3	5.7	4.6	0.2
Eastern	975,251	25.0	40.9	1.1	32.5	0.5
Western	3,919,807	84.7	5.8	1.5	6.9	1.1
Central	2,009,248	65.6	7.5	19.0	7.5	0.4
Southern	1,882,661	95.0	0.8	1.3	2.7	0.2
North-Western	1,704,334	89.9	2.8	0.5	6.6	0.2
North-Central	849,492	91.2	1.6	0.5	6.9	0.2
Uva	914,522	76.2	4.7	15.1	3.7	0.3
Sabaragamuwa	1,482,031	85.4	2.3	8.8	3.4	0.5
Total	14,846,750	74.0	12.7	5.5	7.3	0.5

The table above gives the ethnic composition of the population of Sri Lanka, province-wise on a percentage basis as taken from the Census of 1981. The Sri Lankan Tamils are mainly concentrated in the Northern Province (86.3%) and Eastern Province (40.9%). Historically, the Eastern Province had a much larger concentration of Sri Lankan Tamils than the 1981 Census figure shows. But state-aided colonisation, more marked since Independence in 1948, has led to a change in the demography of the province and the Tamils losing their majority status in the province, as the following Census figures clearly show.

Census Year	Tamils	Sinhalese
1946	52.3%	8.4%
1981	40.9%	25.0%

The position of Tamils in this province since 1981 has further deteriorated. Nevertheless the Eastern Province is even so predominantly Tamil-speaking, because the Moors (32.5% in 1981) with their descendants from South India are essentially Tamil speaking. Thus the north-east region has been recognised in various pieces of legislation as well as for administrative purposes as Tamil-speaking all along even after Independence. The Northern Province, with the creation of Kilinochchi, today comprises the districts of Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya; while the Eastern Province consists of the districts of Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara. The other seven provinces are predominantly Sinhalese as seen from the above table. However, the upcountry provinces viz the Central and Uva provinces where the tea plantations are, show significant percentages of Indian Tamils viz 19.0 % and 15.1 % respectively.

Sri Lanka is thus a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious country.

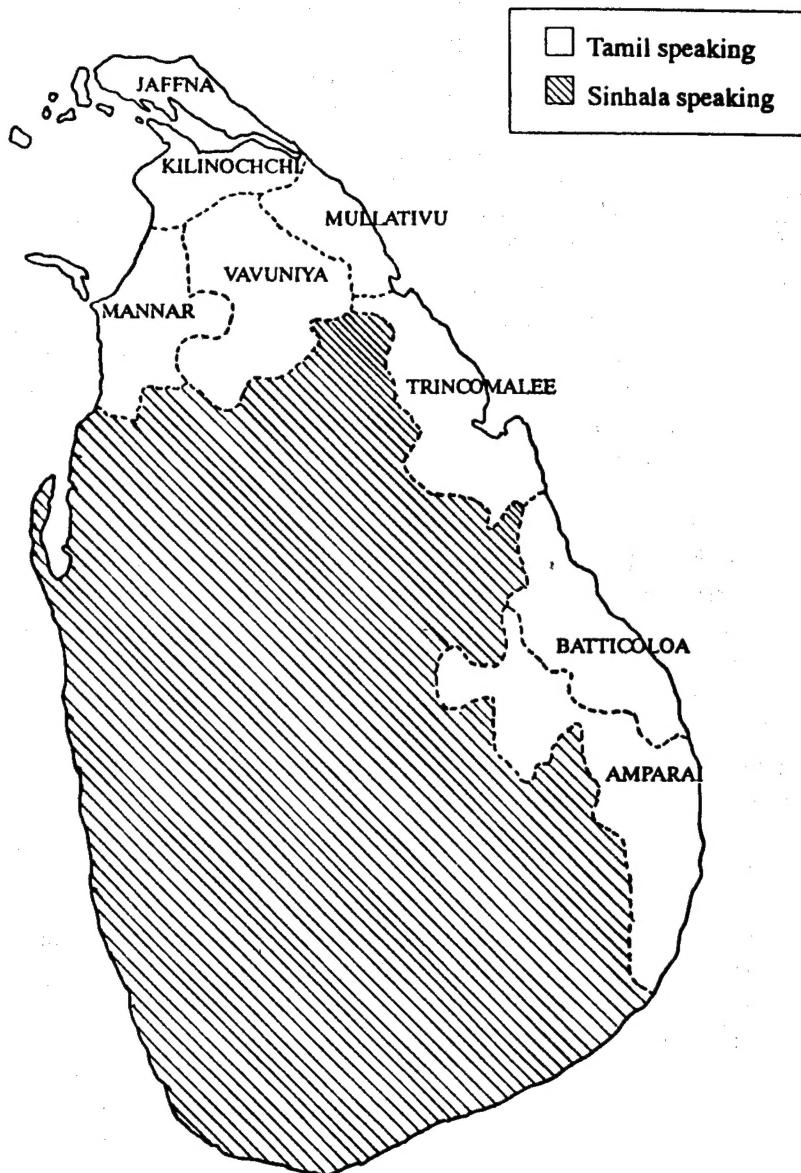


## CHAPTER 1

### ILANKAI / ELAM AND LANKA

In pre-historic times, Ilankai or Lanka must have been a part of South India. There must have been free movements of tribes from South India to the island. Early Tamil literary works refer to land submergences in ancient times in the southern-most parts of India. The Pali Chronicles of Lanka have also referred to such submergences in the island. Geological research tends to support such happenings. Even after Ilankai or Lanka became a separate island, movements of tribes and peoples continued because of geographical proximity. As the University History of Ceylon clearly states, "The close geological link with the island's early history has meant that the island's early human history has been closely bound up with that of the sub-continent. The early settlers came from there bringing with them arts, crafts and culture to their new home". A critical examination of the pre-historic stone implements and material remains discovered in South India and Lanka confirms without the slightest doubt that human beings originally migrated from South India to the island. Dr Susantha Goonatilake in a paper reinterpreted some of the material in the Chronicles regarding early Sri Lankan culture on the basis of recent archaeological findings. He has shown that in the pre-historic period Sri Lanka and South India had been inhabited by a common group of people, with similar economic structures, technological base and culture.

The earliest peoples to come to the island were probably the Veddic and Australoid jungle tribes who were found as well in South India from ancient times. They represented a stage of development which was essentially a nomadic hunter, food-gatherer way of life. The remnants of these peoples are believed to be the Veddahs of today. The earliest known settlements of the island according to archaeological finds, tradition, historical and literary records were those of the pre-historic Dravidian tribes and peoples, the Rakshasas (ராக்ஷஸர்), Yakshas (Yakkas) (யக்கர்) and Nagas (நாகர்). They were found in southern India and could only have come to the island from over there. Again as S. Paranavitana observed, the megalithic monuments found in South India and Lanka are similar and belong to the



SRI LANKAN POPULATION DISTRIBUTION 1981

Dravidian speaking peoples. This archaeological evidence is supported by Tamil literary sources. Thus among the other Dravidian speaking peoples to come to the island early were naturally the Tamils from the opposite coast in South India. The discovery of these megalithic artefacts and burial urns puts beyond doubt the presence of Dravidian / Tamil settlements and Dravidian culture along the north-western coast and other parts of the island. As peaceful immigrants, colonists and traders, the early settlements they made were the agricultural settlements in the north-west and south-east and the trading settlements in the coastal seaport areas of the island. These represented a stage of development based on food production, settled village existence and trade.

The next stage can be said to have led to the establishment of chieftancies / principalities and kingdoms. In South India, as observed by Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "three ancient kingdoms, the Chola, Chera and Pandya maintained an old and independent civilization distinguished in literary achievement and sea-borne trade with Europe and the far East". The Tamils influenced the course of the island's history about the same time that they gained mastery in South India, by establishing their kingdoms. Given their extensive foreign trade with the Mediterranean as well as the East, the ports on the South Indian and later on the Lankan coasts functioned as centres of entrepot trade. Many Tamil traders and merchants thus settled around these ports in the island. As B.C. Law observes the coming of the merchants and traders from India is a fact which is borne out by some of the ancient inscriptions of Lanka. Soon the Greeks and the Romans came to trade directly with the region.

Ilankai or Lanka has been a big draw at all times to different peoples of the world. Hence, it was called at different times by different names in its history. From ancient times, the island has attracted to its shores divergent peoples lured by its pearls, gems and spices. In those early times, it was the north and north-west parts of the island that were the more civilised parts of the country. As observed by S.Casie Chitty, "There can be no doubt, the commercial intercourse of the Greeks and Romans with Ceylon was confined to the North and North-western parts". The ports in this region, Mantai and Kadiramalai ( Kanterodai ) in particular, grew in importance. The pre-eminence of Mantai as a great port of antiquity and a veritable supermarket, a mahasantai or Mantai for short is well documented. The description of the

Indian and Lankan trade by Cosmas Indicopleustes, the Egyptian Greek writer ( circa 534 AD ), places beyond any doubt the importance of the marts at Mantai and Kadiramalai. In the second century AD, the ships sailing from the Pandyan country invariably also touched at a port in the Jaffna peninsula. By about the seventh and eighth centuries, Mantai was abandoned perhaps because of the difficulty of navigation; Kayts under the name of Kalah in the Jaffna Peninsula became the centre of trade and ships from the East as well as the West found safe anchorage at this port. This port was visited by European and Muslim travellers until the 16th century.

During the middle ages came the Arabs, again drawn by the trade. In course of time, the centres of trade gradually shifted to the western coast of the island. When the Portuguese, the first of the Europeans, arrived in 1505, it was the western port of Colombo that drew them. The Portuguese were followed by the Dutch and the British. Each of these peoples called the island by different names. To its peoples, almost right through their history, it was known as Ilankai and / or Elam to the Tamils and Lanka to the Sinhalese. Foreigners though called it by different names. It is more with the names by which the island was called in ancient times and how these names were derived that we are specially concerned with here. They provide a useful key, as well, to understanding the early history of the island.

As observed earlier, Lanka was the classical name bestowed on the island by the Indian epic Ramayana. The name Lanka was however derived from its Tamil form Ilankai. Ilankai comes from the Tamil verb "ilanku" ( இலங்கு ) = to shine or glitter and means "that which glitters". It earned this name on account of the glittering of the gold and gems found on its surface. As observed by M.S. Purnalingam Pillai , " The change of Ilankai into Lanka needs little explanation. The spirit of the Aryan languages where unlike in Tamil, the letter L can begin a word, would naturally eliminate the initial letter I in assimilating the name into its vocabulary" <sup>4</sup>. Thus the Tamil Ilankai became Lanka in its Sanskrit form. That this is clearly so can be seen from the fact that the word Lanka in Sanskrit does not mean anything. The meaning of the word Lanka as resplendent comes therefore from the Tamil form Ilankai, in turn derived from the Tamil verb ilanku ( to glitter).

The celebrated epic, the Ramayana, relates the abduction of Sita, wife of Rama, by Ravana, the King of Lanka, the invasion of Lanka by Rama and the

rescue of Sita after a war and defeat and death of Ravana. The bridge built by Hanuman for the passage of Rama's army to Lanka was later, on English maps, referred to as Adam's Bridge. It touched the island of Rameswaram in South India which took its name from a shrine to Lord Ishwara ( Siva ) established by Rama on his victorious return to India. Rameswaram means Rama's Isvara, Rama's Lord, that is Siva recognised and worshipped by Rama, according to the Saivas as his Lord. The shrine in Rameswaram is today one of the most frequented of the sacred places in India.

The Ramayana tradition lives on in Lanka as well even today in the worship of Vibishana, brother of Ravana in Kelaniya and Lakshamana, brother of Rama as Lord Saman ( Lak-Saman ) in Sabaragamuva. Ravana is remembered in place names such as Ravanaguha ( Ravana's cave ) situated at Ella regarded as the last retreat of Ravana. The waterfall in the vicinity bears the name of Ravana Ela. The Great Basses Lighthouse, which stands out on a solitary rock in the south-east sea of Lanka is still called Ravana's fort. Sita's name lives on too in place names such as Sita-talawa, ( Sita's plain ), Sita-ela ( Sita's stream ), Sita-kunt ( Sita's pond ) as well as Sita-Eliya and Sitawaka in the regions where she is said to have been confined by Ravana. Thus in the words of C.S.Navaratnam " the Ramayana though not a book of history in the modern sense, has an inner core of historical facts" <sup>5</sup>. Again Professor B.B.Lal in his 1993 report of the " Archaeology of Ramayana Sites " project stated that " the combined evidence from the five excavated sites under the project shows there did exist a historical basis for the Ramayana ". If tradition is living truth, it needs to be recognised too that the traditions of a people cannot be rejected in toto. There is often a historical basis to such traditions.

Being adjacent to South India and its Tamil people, it was inevitable that from very early times, South India exerted profound and enduring influences on the island not only commercially, but also culturally and politically. The ancient names by which the island was called by the neighbouring Tamil kingdoms of South India also testify to the close contacts between it and those kingdoms in the proto-historic and early historic period. Hence the Tamil inspired names for Lanka are an impressive list. Such are the names Ilankai, Elam or Ilam, Elamandalam, Ela-nadu, Ila-nara and Ila-nagar ( Nagar of Ilam ). Ilankai as we have seen earlier is the Tamil equivalent from which Lanka was derived. It has come down to us from Indian tradition such as from the Skanda Puranam. As stated by P. Arunachalam, " the earliest Indian

tradition about Ceylon ( Ilankai ) is recorded in the Skanda Puranam, the story of the rise and fall of a mighty and wicked Titan for whose overthrow Skanda or Kartikeya, the god of war and wisdom was incarnated. The echoes of that contest live in a remote forest shrine in the south-eastern corner of the island called after him Kartikeya Grama ( Karthirgamam or Kataragama ) where after his victory he wooed and won a chieftain's daughter who shares with him the worship of millions from Cashmere to Ceylon". There was also a region with Kanchi as capital in South India in ancient times named as Mavilankai ( Maha-Lanka or the Malange of Ptolemy, the Greek geographer). The region was so-called according to V.Kanakasabhai because its products were similar to those of Ilankai.

The more familiar name in Tamil by which the island was called by the Tamils of South India was Elam or Ilam ( ஏலம் ) whichever way it is transliterated into English. Thus Ravana, King of Ilankai was also known in Tamil as Ela Venthan, King of Elam. Elam means gold and the name Elam is a pure Tamil word for this island of gold. Once again it refers to the island of gold and gems and all that glitters on its surface. It was called so not only in the spoken word but also in ancient Tamil literature. In the Tamil classics, the Tamil speaking areas were divided into Cheramandalam, Cholamandalam, Pandya mandalam, Thondamandalam and Elamandalam (Ilankai ). This further shows that Ilankai and South India were under one cultural orbit in those times. In the Tamil anthologies of the Sangam period, there appear the names of poets and authors from Elam who had connections with the Tamil Sangam. Thus Elaththu Poothan Devanar was the author of several poems during the Second Sangam; there were many from Elam who graced the Third Sangam. According to Mudaliyar C.Rasanayagam, "the island must have been so called because Elu was spoken there or perhaps the language was called Elu as it was spoken in Elam"<sup>7</sup>. Either way as is the case generally, there is a close affinity in the names used for the land and the language of its people. Though Elu was the earliest spoken language in the island, it was only a dialect and not a literary one. The poets as we know submitted their works to the Tamil Sangam in Tamil. According to C Rasanayagam, "the poets, kings and pandits cultivated it ( Tamil ) for literary purposes. Tamil continued to be the Court language of Ceylon kings for several centuries".

As observed earlier, Elam or Ilam was the name given to the island by the Tamils of South India. The Pali equivalent of Ilam is also Ilam. According to C. Rasanayagam, it was from Ilam that Silam or Sihalam as well as Sinhalam were derived as names by which the island was called by later Buddhist writers. It is thus seen that the term Sinhala is derived as follows, ie Ilam – Sri-ilam – Si-ilam – Sihalam – Sihala – Sinhala. Some writers seek, however, to trace the word Ilam the other way round from Silam or Sihalam. This obviously cannot be so, as the first time the term Sihala or Sinhala was used was in the 4th-5th century AD and the term gained currency amongst Buddhist writers only after that time. It would be like making the tail wag the dog. The fact is Elam or Ilam was the word used by the Dravidian Tamils to refer to the island long before the advent of the mythical Vijaya on the scene. The word Elam is a pure Tamil word meaning gold. Hence there is no need to derive it from another word. This word is found in Elam, one of the kingdoms founded by the Dravidians in the Persian Gulf. From early Tamil Sangam literature dating back to several centuries before the Christian era , the word Elam was used to refer to Ilankai. It is also worth mentioning that the people living in the Malabar were called Eshavar ( ஏஶவர் ), people of Elam from time immemorial. Again, according to K A Nilakanta Sastri, "In the third century BC, cave inscriptions in Ceylon as well as in the Pandyan country, the language used is Tamil. Ceylon is referred to as Ilam"<sup>8</sup>. The other name used viz Ela-nadu simply means the country of Elam.

There is no doubt that Elam was an isle of swaying palms as well. Thennai or Thennai-maram (coconut palm) means a tree of the south and the expression "Ilattu thenkai" ( coconut from Ilam ) confirms the belief that the coconut palm or a species of it was introduced to South India from Elam. There is thus a general belief among the Shanars of the Tirunelveli District in Tamil-Nadu that they were induced to immigrate to India at the time of the introduction of the coconut palm from Ilam. Hence as M.S. Purnalingam Pillai observes, " these Shanars have been known in India as "Ila-kulattu shanars"—shanars of the Ilam tribe"<sup>10</sup>. This explains how the word Elam has also come to mean toddy; for the association with toddy can again be seen as derived from the ilattu thenkai or thennai-maram, the tree of the south, viz the tree from Elam. Toddy was also regarded then to be as valuable as gold.

When the Greek traders came to the island in the 4th and 3rd centuries BC, they heard perhaps from the lips of Tamils who preponderated at the seaports

that the island which was formerly called Ilai-mandalam or Sila Mandalam or Palaya Sila Mandalam ( palaya in Tamil means old ) was also called Tamraparni. They therefore wrote that the island's former name was Palai Simondou dropping the syllable "la" in sila and the name then in use was Taprobane. Thus Ptolemy, the Greek geographer, refers "to Ceylon as the island of Taprobane which was formerly called Simoundou". According to G.C. Mendis, "The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, a merchant's guide for Indian seas, written in the first century AD, says that pearls, precious stones, muslins and tortoise-shell were exported from Ceylon which it calls Palaesimoundu"<sup>11</sup>. Several writers, however, had difficulty in deciphering this name "Simoundou". As C.Rasanayagam writes, "The word obviously represented the Tamil name "Palai Sila Mandalam"<sup>12</sup>. Thus Ilankai was always known to the ancient Tamils as Elam or Elamandalam.

The name given by the Greeks to the island which became familiar to English readers was however Taprobane immortalised as it was by the poet Milton in the following lines:

*"Embassies from regions far remote  
From India and the golden Chersonese  
And from utmost Indian isle Taprobane".*

Taprobane is a term which was for the first time used by Megasthenes, the Greek Ambassador to the Court of Chandragupta at Pataliputra about the 4th century BC to indicate a region in the extreme south of the Indian sub-continent. By Taprobane he was actually referring to Tamraparni (in Tamil= தாமரைப்பனி ), a part of the Pandyan kingdom. The Tamil name Tamaraipani, according to Lassen (in his Indische Alterhumskunde Vol I) stands for " a tank with red lotuses". Lanka too owing to its proximity to the southern tip of India was considered to be an extension of Tamraparni or Taprobane. The name Taprobane is thus a corruption of the name Tamraparni, the Pali equivalent of which is Tambapanni. Tambapanni is one of the names given to the island in the Pali Chronicles of Lanka. As explained in the Mahavamsa, the ancient Pali Chronicle of the 6th century AD, the name Tambapanni was derived from tamba-panayo(copper-palmed ) and given to the island by the mythical Vijaya and his followers. As may be recounted, the Mahavamsa account begins with the arrival of Vijaya and his followers sometime in the fifth century BC who "exhausted by sea-sickness sat down at the spot where they had landed out of the vessels, supporting themselves on the palms of their hands pressed to the ground; whence the

name Tamba-panni and from the same cause also this renowned land became celebrated under the name"<sup>13</sup>. As remarked by P. Arunachalam, "this is a fanciful explanation"<sup>14</sup>.

According to C.Rasanayagam, the name Taprobane was borrowed by the Greeks from the Sanskrit / Tamil Tamraparni or Tamaravarni. Tamraparni whose Pali form is Tambapanni has nothing to do with the copper-coloured palms. It is a name given to the island by the Tamil immigrants from the Tinnevelly District in South India through which runs the river called to this day as Tamraparni. The name Tamraparni also means tree with red leaves (tamra means red and parni from parna a leaf). According to Bishop R.Caldwell "it would seem probable that at Korkai a place at the mouth of this river, the first settlement of civilised men in Tinnevelly was formed and it was there that the name Tamraparni by which the river became known was given to it"<sup>15</sup>. It is most likely that a colony of settlers from the mouth of this river Tamraparni in Tinnevelly carried the name over to a settlement founded by it on the opposite coast of Lanka. This is a common practice amongst colonists ancient and modern. Hence the place was already known as Tamraparni long before the mythical Vijaya is supposed to have arrived there. As observed by H.W.Codrington, "This properly was the name of a district on the north-west coast in ancient times, the portion of the country best known to the sea faring traders; as in the case of India and of Asia itself, the name of the part has been transferred to the whole"<sup>16</sup>.

From very ancient times, there were Tamil settlements on the north-western coast of Lanka. This is seen from the discovery of burial urns and other objects similar to the Adichchanallur megalithic finds of the Tinnevelly district which date back to over 3,000 years BC. These burial urns were discovered at the 21st mile post on the Puttalam Marichchukaddi Road in 1955. According to C.S.Navaratnam, " they are supported by the poems of the "Purananuru" of the Sangam period "<sup>17</sup>. According to S Paranavitana, "The few megalithic monuments and urn burials discovered in Ceylon are obviously an overflow from South India. The archaeological evidence is supported by literary sources"<sup>18</sup>. The discovery of these burial urns puts beyond doubt the presence of Dravidian settlements and Dravidian culture along the north-western coast of the island long before the advent of the mythical Vijaya. The north-western coast being opposite to the mouth of the river Tamraparni, the name would readily have suggested itself to those early

immigrants. The derivation given in the Mahavamsa to Tambapanni is to say the least fanciful. According to C.Rasanayagam again, "as for Tambapanni, tamba is copper and panni may also mean the palm of the hand and imagination supplied the connection between the two"<sup>19</sup>. And as B.C.Law comments, "while playing on the word, tambapanni, ( red-hand ), they ( the Chroniclers ) betray their ignorance of the fact that Tambapanni was just a Pali equivalent of the Sanskrit name Tamraparni or Tamravarni meaning the copper-coloured or red-coloured"<sup>20</sup>.

As for the word Sihala or Sinhala, it does not occur in any of the Brahmi inscriptions in Lanka. S.Paranavitana seeks to explain this away by saying that, "this name ( Sinhala ) does not occur at all in them for the good reason that as almost everyone in the land was a Sinhalese"<sup>21</sup>. This, to say the least, is fanciful guesswork. A truer explanation has to be sought elsewhere. Etymologically, the word "Sing" can be traced to a Munda-Austric origin. The supreme God of these Austric peoples is "Sing Bonga". His revelation and visible symbol is the Sun called "Singi". It was from Singi that place names in India such as Singbhumi, Singur and Singapura have their origin. The Buddhist story of Singabahu ( Sihabahu or Sinhabahu ) and the lion father originated as an explanation later of the place name Singapura. It was deduced from the Jataka tales. The Sinha tale meaning lion was carried by Buddhist monks and traders from these regions to Lanka. Hence the term Sihala itself occurs in Lankan sources for the first time in the Dipavamsa belonging to the 4th-5th century AD. The expression Sihaladwipa ( Sinhala Island ) occurs in a text by Buddhaghosa written around the 5th century AD. The Mahavamsa written in the 6th century contains the term Sihala only twice. As S.J.Tambiah says, "The term Sihala is conspicuous by its absence in the Brahmi inscriptions which are accepted as the earliest historical documents of Sri Lanka"<sup>22</sup>. Hence it was in later commentaries, such as the attakathas, that the island is referred to not only as Tambapanni but also as Simhaladwipa or Sinhaladwipa. In the frequency of its use in later times by Buddhist writers, Simhaladwipa or Sinhaladwipa prevailed over Tambapanni. Simhaladwipa or Sinhaladwipa simply means the island of the Simhala or Sinhala ( lion race ) people referring to the mythical origins of the Sinhala race. According to C.Rasanayagam, the derivation of Simhalam or Sinhalam is a further piece of fanciful invention. As he observes, "the story of a lion living with a princess was too wild a piece of romance even for the 5th century BC"<sup>23</sup>. More likely though, as R.A.L.H.Gunawardena

ventures to suggest, the lion was the emblem of the ruling house of Lanka and that the dynasty got its name from the emblem. In his words, "When the island came to be called Sinhaladipa or the island of the Sinhalas, this name reflected the claim of the ruling house and this dominant social group to political power over the whole island"<sup>24</sup>.

The closest Sinhala name used for the island at one time (5-6<sup>th</sup> century) thus was Sinhaladwipa or Sinhaladipa. But the use of this name did not survive for long. It is from these words Simhaladwipa or Sinhaladwipa that M.D.Raghavan writes that the Arabs later came to call the island as "Serendib" and the Portuguese "Ceilao". These names were, according to him, apparently derived from Simhala or Sinhala when changed to "Seren" and "Selen" and Dwipa to "dib" ( island ). Hence to the Arabs, the island came to be known as Serendib. This seems hardly a plausible explanation. It is difficult to see how "Seren" and "Selen" could be derived from Simhala or Sinhala. The more likely explanation is that Serendib was derived from Cherantivu, the island (tivu) of the Cheras. As L.A.Krishna Iyer and L.K.Balaratnam say the term Chera or Sera, "is the Dravidian equivalent of Naga"<sup>25</sup>. In otherwords, long before the Nagas were so called by the Sanskrit writers, a tribe of them was known as Cheras or Seras and Nagadipa which was occupied by them was known as Cherantivu. Cheran was thus changed to Seren and tivu to dib by the Moors. In the words of M.S. Purnalingam Pillai, "In later times, it was called Serendib, a corruption not of Sinhaladwipa but of Cheran-divu"<sup>26</sup>. As the Moors first came to Lanka from the Malabar Coast, it seems more than likely that they got the name for Lanka from the people of the Malabar Coast, the original home of the Chera tribes. In modern times, came the Portuguese, Dutch and British. The Portuguese obviously got the name of the island from the Arabs. They called the island Ceilao by changing Seren (-dib) to Selen and then to Ceilao and from whence the Dutch who followed called it "Zeylan" and the French "Ceylan". The British who left an enduring influence on the island called it Ceylon. With Independence in 1948, the island yet continued to be called Ceylon until 1972 when on becoming a Republic it reverted to calling itself Lanka, with the honorific "Sri" ( again a Sanskrit word ) placed before it. Thus it calls itself today as Sri Lanka, meaning - the Resplendent Isle. There is no name for the island today in the Sinhala language. The present name (Sri) Lanka is a name bestowed by Indian tradition, as mentioned earlier, and is its Sanskrit form. This name in turn, as seen earlier, was derived from the island's Tamil name Ilankai.



## CHAPTER II

### MYTHS AND MISREPRESENTATIONS IN TRADITIONAL LANKAN HISTORY

Before proceeding to a reconstruction of the early history of the Tamils of Ilankai, it would be necessary to dispel some myths and misrepresentations surrounding the early recorded history of Lanka as has come down to us. The recorded history of the Sinhala people begins with the advent of the mythical Vijaya, the founding father of the Sinhala race as narrated in the Mahavamsa. Though the story is steeped in myth and invention ( as we shall see later on ) there are many who begin their early history of the island based on the Mahavamsa and the legend of Vijaya in it. They may be said to belong to the Mahavamsa School of Sri Lankan history. These historians accept the Mahavamsa account as the starting point in the recorded history of the island. There are others of course who dismiss the story of Vijaya as a legend or as fictitious.

In relating the legend of Vijaya, K M de Silva a modern historian writes as follows. "In the Mahavamsa, that irreplaceable source for the reconstruction of the early history of the island, the story of man in Sri Lanka begins with the arrival there sometime in the fifth century BC of Vijaya ( the legendary founding father of the Sinhalese ) and his turbulent companions--700 in all--who had been banished for misconduct from the kingdom of Sihapura in Northern India by Sihabahu, Vijaya's father. After a long and eventful voyage, they land near the present site of Puttalam on the northwest coast and set about the business of establishing a foothold in the island"<sup>1</sup>. What flows from this account is the statement as historical truth that the story of man in Sri Lanka begins with Vijaya's coming and that the first colonisers of the island were the tribes from North India. Here again it is better said in the words of K M de Silva who writing further says that "beneath this charming exercise in myth-making lurks a kernel of historical truth--the colonisation of the island by the Indo-Aryan tribes from North India. The original home of the first Indo-Aryan immigrants to Sri Lanka was probably north-west India

and the Indus region<sup>2</sup>." It is clear that there is no basis for making such statements based on a legend. The story of man in Sri Lanka must at least begin with the earliest known inhabitants of the island. Furthermore, there is no historical evidence to-date of any colonisation of the island by Indo-Aryan tribes from North India. As K.M.de Silva himself writes, (referring to S.P.F. Senaratne's "Pre-historic Archaeology in Ceylon" p 31) " We have at present no archaeological evidence with regard to the early Indo-Aryan settlers. ----In particular, we have no archaeological finds that could be traced back to either the west or east coasts of Northern India"<sup>3</sup>.

As is well known, long, long before the advent of the mythical Vijaya, the island had been occupied by peoples. The Mahavamsa and the other Chronicles too testify to this fact. According to the Mahavamsa, the first encounter of the mythical Vijaya soon after his landing was with Kuveni, the Yakkini princess. Through a marriage with the amorous Kuveni, Vijaya with her help, subjugates the people and goes on to establish his kingdom in the island. What emerges from this account is the fact that the island was occupied by peoples, the Yakkas and the Nagas as the Mahavamsa itself refers to them. But these peoples are summarily dismissed as demons and spirits and are not to be regarded as human beings. Thus the Rajavaliya, another chronicle, states that after the death of Ravana, Lanka has been inhabited by demons for 1844 years. According to the Ramayana tradition, after the death of Ravana, Vibishana his brother was installed as king of Lanka by Rama. Obviously then, the facts have been disregarded to make the statement that the first humans to come to the island were the Indo-Aryan tribes from North India. Thus the chronicle Dipavamsa, literally, "The Story of the Island" purports to narrate this story from the earliest human times. It introduces Vijaya as the first occupant and founder of the Sinhala race in these words: "This was the island of Lanka called Sihala after the lion. Listen to this chronicle of the origin of the island which I narrate".<sup>4</sup>

In an effort to establish that the Sinhalas are the original occupiers of the island, the Chronicles misrepresent the early Dravidian peoples such as the Rakshasas, Yakshas (Yakkas) and Nagas as non-humans and seek to validate their version by creating myths about the past. We shall refer later to the Rakshasas of Ravana's time, the Yakshas ( Yakkas ) and the Nagas to show that far from being demons they had attained certain levels of civilization and culture. But what the Pali chronicles themselves reveal is the fact that the

island was occupied by peoples at least from the time of Ravana, king of Lanka. According to these Chronicles, the Yakshas ( Yakkas ) occupied portions of Lanka such as Mahiyangana and the north-central region; they were in the south and the coastal districts outside the limits of Nagadipa and Kalyani ( Kelaniya ) in the north and west of the country respectively. These details are given in connection with the Buddha's mythical visits to the island before Vijaya's so-called advent. On his second visit, the Buddha is said to have visited Nagadipa to settle a dispute between two Naga kings for a gem-set throne. This incident is also referred to in the Tamil epic "Manimekalai" written in the 2nd century AD long before the Mahavamsa was even composed. These references establish the presence of Yaksha and Naga kingdoms in the island from very early times, long before the so-called arrival of the mythical Vijaya.

The other stream of people who were in occupation of the island long before the advent of the mythical Vijaya were the Dravidians or Tamils. Here again the facts are misrepresented to show that the Dravidians arrived in the island after the tribes from North India. In the words of K M de Silva ( who puts across this view of the Mahavamsa School ), "the evidence available at present would tend strongly to support the conclusion that Aryan settlement and colonisation preceded the arrival of the Dravidians by a few centuries". Once again the truth is to be found elsewhere as the available evidence presents a different picture. There is enough evidence both here and from Indian and other sources that there were settlements of Dravidian ( Tamil ) peoples in Lanka from pre- or proto-historic times long before the advent of the mythical Vijaya. So much so that even K. M. de Silva concedes this point though maintaining that there is no firm evidence to say when the Dravidians first came to the island. In his words "the Dravidian influence was the third major ingredient in the island's development in proto-historic times. There is no firm evidence as to when the Dravidians first came to the island but come they did either as invaders or as peaceful immigrants".

Though there may be no firm evidence at present as to when the Dravidians first came to the island, but come they did long before the so-called arrival of the north Indian tribes. There is strong evidence both from literary as well as archaeological and epigraphical sources to support the view that the Dravidians were long in occupation of the island before the advent of the so-called Aryan tribes. It is well known and accepted by almost all historians

that as far as India is concerned, the Dravidians were well established all over India long before the influx there of the Aryan tribes. It is therefore strange that it is only in the case of Lanka that a view is put forward that the Dravidians arrived in the island after the Aryan tribes. Lanka which lies just 30 miles from across the Palk Strait from South India could hardly be said to have been missed by them. As rightly observed by Paul E. Peiris, the historian, "It stands to reason that a country which is only 30 miles from India and which would have been seen by Indian fishermen every morning as they sailed out to catch their fish would have been occupied as soon as the continent was peopled by men who understood to sail. I suggest that the north of Ceylon was a flourishing settlement before Vijaya was born. I consider it as proved that at any rate such was its condition before the commencement of the Christian Era". Sir William Jones, Bertolacci, and Bennet in their accounts of Ceylon enumerate several facts which tend to show that the Tamils of India knew and colonized Ceylon long anterior to the so-called Vijayan conquest.

More importantly, mention may be made of the Tamil country in South India which was so highly civilised and powerful in ancient times that it had developed an extensive commercial intercourse with the outside world. Thus P.T.Srinivasa Iyengar writes that "not only was there commercial intercourse between the Tamil country and the Mesopotamian Valley but there is some evidence that the trade of South India extended to Egypt in the 3rd millennium BC". This is further brought out by Jawaharlal Nehru when he writes that "a considerable trade flourished between South India and Europe. Pearls, ivory, gold, rice, pepper, peacocks and even monkeys were sent to Babylon and Egypt and Greece and later to Rome. Teakwood from the Malabar Coast went even earlier to Chaldea and Babylonia. And all this trade or most of it was carried in Indian ships manned by Dravidians. This will enable one to realise what an advanced position South India occupied in the ancient world". It is also on record that South Indian kingdoms had sent colonising expeditions to several places in the East Indies such as Java, Sumatra and Malaya. Such being the case, it is difficult to even contemplate that the Dravidians had failed to occupy Lanka which was on their very doorstep before the advent of the mythical Vijaya.

There can be no doubt about the antiquity of the trade carried on by South India with the West and the East. Nor can there be any doubt that the Tamils

carried on this trade not only from the Indian side but also from the Lankan side as they had made trading settlements in the island. As pointed out by K.M.de Silva, the island's trade with South India was always of crucial importance; it formed part of the latter's (South India's) trade with the Roman Empire. Hence as observed by S.J.Gunasegaram, "The northern portion of the island was from remotest times under the rule of the Tamils with the famous pearl fisheries of Mannar on the west coast and Tamblegam on the east coast under their control"<sup>10</sup>. Again as Paul E.Peiris remarked, ". Long before the arrival of Vijaya ,there were in Lanka five recognised isvarams to Siva which claimed the adoration of all India. These were Tiruketeeswaram near Mahatittha; Munneeswaram dominating Salawatta and the pearl fishery; Tondeswaram near Mantota; Tirukoneswaram near the great bay of Kottiyar and Naguleswaram near Kankesanthurai. Their situation close to these ports cannot be the result of accident or caprice and was probably determined by the 'concourse of a wealthy mercantile population whose religious wants called for attention'"<sup>11</sup>. Given the fact that these ancestral Hindu shrines date back to a hoary past and that Rama and Ravanna are said to have worshipped in them, this would refer to a time at least over 1000 years BC. H.W. Codrington was of opinion that the temple of Tirukoneswaram was more than 3000 years old. As these shrines were situated in widely separated parts of the island, they are an index to the widespread distribution of the Tamils from very early times. They testify to a very strong Tamil population in and around the seaport towns of Lanka. They show that the Tamils were also a mercantile population and that they entered the island as traders and peaceful immigrants at whatever port was convenient of access.

In archaeological finds unearthed, a much earlier presence in the island of the early Dravidians is revealed. An important development here was the spread of the megalithic culture( பெரும் கற்கலாப் பண்டாடு) to the island from South India. The urn burials in Lanka are very similar to those in South India and the rituals and ceremonies connected with these urn burials are attested to in the earliest Tamil literature of the Sangam period. Dr S. Paranavitana explicitly stated that these megalithic monuments and urn burials belong to the Dravidian speaking people. As he observes, "these megalithic sites and urn fields are found throughout the regions inhabited by Dravidian speaking people. The burial customs to which they bear witness are referred to in early Tamil literature. It is therefore legitimate to infer that the people who buried their dead in dolmens and cists as well as in large earthen jars were

Dravidians"<sup>12</sup>. Several funerary urns containing human skeletal remains with artefacts in bronze and iron have been unearthed in and around Pomparippu and other sites on the western coast of the island. They are remarkably similar to those found at Adichchanallur and other related sites in the Tinnevelly District of South India. In the words of K.M.de Silva, "the similarities are most noticeable in the Adichchanallur site just across the water from Pomparippu"<sup>13</sup>. However he goes on to say that since the Adichchanallur finds have been dated at around 300 BC, the same date is tentatively assigned to the Pomparippu complex which is regarded as being contemporary with the former. Alexander Rea who carried out excavations at Adichchanallur contends that the bronze and iron age culture is that of the early Dravidians.( Catalogue of the pre-historic Antiquities from Adichchanallur and Perumbiar by Alexander Rea ). M.Lapicque too arrived at the conclusion that the remains at Adichchanallur belonged to a Proto-Dravidian race. Hence these finds are dated as far back as over 3000 BC, belonging as they do to a megalithic culture. It has also been shown that the Mohenjo-daro and Harappa culture agrees with that of the Adichchanallur in burying the dead in a crouching position in terra-cotta coffins. Cremation came with the Aryans and these burial customs hence pre-date the Aryan influx into India ( circa 1900 BC). In Lanka, the megalithic culture was not restricted to the western littoral but in fact had a wider distribution in the island. Monuments and artefacts that could be described as megalithic are reported to have been discovered at Anuradhapura, Habarana, Padiyagampola, Okanda near Kataragama and Katiraveli in the Batticoloa District. And as P.Raghupathy observes, "Two of them, Anaikkottai and Kalapumi, were found in the rescue excavations as megalithic burial sites, which imply that there were permanent megalithic settlements in the Peninsula"<sup>14</sup> ( Jaffna Peninsula ). According to S Pathmanathan, "the megalithic people may have introduced into the island, iron and paddy cultivation by means of irrigation"<sup>15</sup>. In the words of Dr S.Goonatilake, "It is in these settlements associated with the South Indian megalithic culture, (which were from available physical evidence, practising an irrigated agriculture—before the so-called coming of the Aryans ) that we have to look for the first beginnings of our traditional culture"<sup>16</sup>.

The archaeological evidence is supported by epigraphical evidence of the presence of the Dravidian people from the earliest times. There are four Brahmi inscriptions where the ethnic name "Dameda" ( Tamil ) occurs in the

inscriptions of Lanka, the earliest known records of the country. The term "Dameda" is the Prakrit prototype of Damela, Damila and Dravida. The fact that this ethnic name was used in these inscriptions proves that by the 3rd century BC, the Tamil people already had a distinct identity in the southern regions of India, viz South India and Lanka. The nucleus of the Tamil ethnicity and culture was the region of South India. The kingdom of Pandya played a very significant role in articulating this culture. Mathurai was doubtless the most famous and important city in Tamilakam at this early period being the capital city of the Pandyas who were renowned as the most powerful of the Tamil kings and munificent patrons of poets. This old city was famous for its gates and towers. Valmiki's Ramayana refers to Pandya as follows:

"Then hastening on your way behold,  
The Pandyas gates of pearl and gold"<sup>17</sup>.

Technically, history begins with written evidence and throughout South Asia it was the 3rd century BC that marked the transition from the proto-historic to the historic with the advent of Brahmi inscriptions. All the earliest Brahmi inscriptions in South India are concentrated in the Pandyan country. There are two inscriptions, one a donation by a householder from Ilankai (Eelakkutumbikan) to the monks at Tirupparankunram and another from Ilankai mentioned at Muttupatti. Again, parallel to South India, the megalithic phase led Lanka into the dawn of history with the appearance of Brahmi inscriptions around the 3rd century BC. There are thus far four inscriptions discovered in Lanka where the Tamils as such are mentioned. And as P.Raghupathy observes, "In Jaffna, Brahmi assignable to 3rd century BC was found both at Kantarotai and Anaikottai"<sup>18</sup>. In the words of Dr Senaka Bandaranayake, "The existence of people with a distinct Tamil ethnic identity from a very early period is evidenced in the Brahmi inscriptions"<sup>19</sup>. All these references are sufficient proof that the Tamils of Lanka were not only the first ethnic group in the social strata of the country as such that were mentioned but also that they had attained a very high level of literacy and culture by this time.

There is more than sufficient evidence to prove the presence of Tamil people in Lanka from pre-historic times, as we have seen. The history of ancient Lanka can be reconstructed in greater detail if more archaeological evidence is forthcoming. The major pre-historic and proto-historic sites in the island need to be systematically excavated and the artefacts found scientifically analysed. Until and unless such work is done, the beginnings of civilization

in Lanka and the date of the first Dravidian settlements in the island would remain open. But two things however are proven. The island was occupied by Dravidian speaking people long, long before the arrival of the mythical Vijaya. Again the Dravidian settlements in the island preceded by many, many centuries the so-called coming of the Indo-Aryan tribes from North India.

A reconstruction of the early history of the Tamils of Ilankai must necessarily begin with the earliest known settlements of the island. That relates no doubt to the period of pre-historic and proto-historic times. As source materials of traditional recorded history of Lanka give only scant details of this period, one needs to look for evidence in archaeological finds and inscriptions as well as literary sources (Tamil and Buddhist) both here and in South India. In the words again of Dr S.Bandaranayake, "An equally significant connection is that the material culture of the proto-historic and early historic periods as well as other non-material cultural phenomena show clear relationships between Sri Lanka and southern India"<sup>20</sup>. As observed earlier, South India exerted powerful and enduring influences on ancient Lanka. All migrations of Tamils came from over there in ancient as well as in modern times. It is therefore only natural to look additionally to South Indian sources and history, in particular, in any reconstruction of the early history of the Tamils of Ilankai. Again, the earliest known settlements in the island were those of the Dravidian speaking peoples, the Rakshasas of Ravana's time and the Yakshas, referred to as Yakkas in the Pali Chronicles. The latter are sometimes referred to separately as the followers of Kubera, God of Wealth and at other times equated with the Rakshasas as their kinsmen. The other known people were the Nagas, a relatively more civilised Dravidian speaking people. These major communities of pre-historic Lanka entered the island no doubt from South India as they were also found over there from the earliest times. The affinities these peoples had with the Tamils and other groups of Dravidians show them as the lineal descendants in culture as well as in physique with the early proto-Dravidian tribes of India. But significantly among the Dravidian speaking people to settle early in the island with an advanced culture, as we have seen, were the Tamils. As all these peoples and their culture were Dravidian, it is now necessary to address the question of who were the Dravidians.



## CHAPTER III

### THEORIES OF DRAVIDIAN ORIGINS

South India is one of the regions of the world in which the earliest human habitation seems to have come into existence. Geologically speaking, the land mass of this region was formed in the Archaean period, the oldest period of the earth's history. From the end of the Pliocene Age, when human life made its first appearance on this planet in certain parts of Africa, South India also seems to have attracted the attention of these first men. During this vast age, there was seen in Africa, Europe and West Asia, the emergence, development and decline of different types of human species, the ancestors of the modern man. Since the echoes of their cultural traits are found in the South Indian context as well, we may presume that those species of men might have penetrated also into South India. The earliest period for which evidence is available was when the sub-continent was inhabited by a folk with short stature, grisly hair and prognathic facial contour. These folk are identified by anthropologists with the Veddic ethnic group who are found even today in small pockets in many parts of South India. They belong to the negroid strain. Quite early in the history of the peninsula, this Veddic group was overlain by an Austroloid group which might have come from the Mediterranean lands. These Austroloids seemed to have lived all over the sub-continent in pre-Dravidian times. With these two ethnic groups and the entry of the proto-Dravidians may be associated the question of the origin of the Dravidians. It is generally and perhaps rightly understood that the term Dravidian, and for that matter the term Aryan indicates a linguistic rather than an ethnic division of peoples. But there are certain basic similarities among the Dravidian speaking peoples in South India. Hence many of the anthropologists and historians have used the term Dravidoid or Dravidian to indicate these inhabitants of South India.

The ancient or proto-Dravidians were the direct ancestors of the Tamils and other peoples now occupying the greater part of Southern India. The word Dravida is widely used as a synonym for Tamil and some writers think that it is a corruption or Sanskritised form of Tamil. This Sanskrit word also refers

to a tract of country in Southern India and it is so defined in the Sabdakalpadruma on the authority of the Mahabharata. In its meaning, "Dravida" stands for southern and the Dravidian languages are broadly the languages of Southern India. The word Dravidian, as observed earlier, though a linguistic term, has thus come to refer to the peoples as well, living in southern India and speaking the Dravidian languages. The Tamil language is the oldest and purest of the Dravidian languages; the others being Telugu as spoken in Andhra, Canarese in Karnataka ( Mysore ) and Malayalam in Kerala. Each of the last three has borrowed to a much larger extent than Tamil from Sanskrit. The remaining twenty-five or so Dravidian dialects have no literary importance. To the general rule that the Dravidian languages belong to the south of India, there is one exception. Brahui is isolated, having its locale in Baluchistan in present day Pakistan. The tribes that speak Brahui resemble to a considerable extent the people of South India in physical characteristics as well. This fact is of considerable significance in reference to the question of Dravidian origins.

The derivation of the term Tamil has also given rise to a number of theories or explanations. According to some philologists, Dravida is derived from Tamir ( Tamil ) while others have followed Bishop R.Caldwell's theory that Tamir is derived from Dravida. Dr.S. K. Chatterjee shows that the word Dramila was used to represent the Tamil land in proto-Dravidian or primitive Dravidian of the early centuries of the first millennium BC and Tamil is derived from it. G.Oppert suggests that Dramila itself is derived from Tirumala, the sacred ( tiru ) tongue of the mountain ( mala ) tribes-the malas, malavas, malayas, mallas, malajas etc. Tiru and mala ( malai in Tamil ) are original Dravidian words. Tiru was changed in time into tira or tara, then contracted to tra or dra and finally to ta ( da ) both letters t and d being identical. From Dramila, Damida to Tamil is a short step unless Tamil is directly derived from Tirumala. Dramila, Dramida and Dravida are said to be Aryan corruptions of Tirumala and found re-admission into South Indian languages as foreign expressions. The fact is that the word Tamil occurs in all the ancient Tamil classics as the common or generic name for the people and their language in India. The word is as old as the Tamil language and hence there is no need to derive it from foreign words like Dravida.

Of the two schools of thought about the origins of the Dravidians, the first school contends that the Dravidians were indigeneous to Southern India. This

is the view according to Tamil traditions. Geological research which tends to support this theory has shown that the Indian Ocean was once a continent extending from Madagascar to the Malay Archipelago connecting South India with Africa and Australia. According to Sclater, the Dravidians entered India from the south long before the submergence of this continent. There are unmistakeable indications in the Tamil traditions that the land affected by the deluge was contiguous with later day Tamilakam ( the Tamil country ) and that after the deluge, the early Dravidians naturally betook themselves to their northern regions. Thus grew from them without a history, the Tamils of the earliest period. According to Oldham, "there is evidence of very close affinities between plants and animals in Africa and India at a very remote period indicating that there was once a continuous stretch of dry land combining South Africa, India and Australia". The aborigines of Australia have thus been associated by some ethnologists with the Dravidians of India. The affinities between them have been based upon the employment of certain words by the two peoples. But Sir William Turner's studies of the characters of the Aboriginal and Dravidian crania have demonstrated the baselessness of such affinities. The Indo-African-Australian origin of the Dravidians however has its supporters. It also accords with the theory that Africa was the original home of man.

Arthur Keith thinks that " the Dravidians were an autochthonously evolved people by an admixture of Vedic and Australoid elements locally"<sup>2</sup>. In course of time they seemed to have undergone certain physical transformations as a result of the change in their habitat and consequent changes in their cultural levels and habits. Before the Aryan irruptions, India was essentially a Dravidian speaking country. T.Burrow has clearly shown that the earliest strata of Vedic literature has a substratum of Dravidian words. The Dravidian speech has survived probably in purer form in small colonies of tribal languages all over India. It is also possible that the Dravidians gradually spread out into the neighbouring countries from this Indian source. Thus the Dravidian languages probably had their origin and evolution in India. Such a development strengthens the view that the Dravidians were an indigenous people. Dr.Macleane says that "the Dravidians are a very primeval race and that they are indigenous to India and specially to South India".<sup>3</sup>

In the oldest extant Tamil classics, there are no traditions pointing to a home for the Tamils outside Tamilakam in South India. The Tamil land is invariably divided by all the early Tamil poets into its five most natural divisions ( lyn tinnai ) ( ஜந்தினை ). The five tinnai may not have any direct relation to definite geographical regions of South India ; the Tamils however evolved this remarkable classification at the very dawn of their literate civilization. This is surely evidence of an innate sense of place, a deep realization of the effects of geography and climate upon human life and even human emotions. Animals like the elephant or the tiger, birds like the peacock or the parrot, grains like tinnai ( தினை ) and varahu ( வரகு ) and trees like vengai ( kine-tree ) are characteristic of the Tamil hills and plains and are not indigenous to any country outside India. Babylon and Egypt as well as Greece and Rome were acquainted with the fame and products of Tamilakam in ancient times and came to her for her teaks and sandalwoods, her pearls and muslins and her peacock and pepper. The earliest Tamil works describe the physical features of the semi-pastoral Tamil people and their life in the Tamil country in such intimate detail. The Tamils thus always believed that from the outset they were the aboriginal inhabitants of the great territories bounded by the two seas on the east and west and by the Venkata Hills in the north and the submerged rivers Palruli and Kumari in the south. Thus Sikandiyar, a pupil of Agastiyar referred to the boundaries of the Tamil country thus:

வேங்கடாங் குமரி தீம்புளாற் பெளவுமென்  
நின்னான் கெல்லை துமிழுது வழக்கே.

( Tamil prevails within the four limits of Venkatam, Kumari and the seas). In brief, the antiquity of the Tamil civilization is undoubted and references in the earliest extant Tamil classics make it probable that the original home of the Dravidians was Tamilakam itself.

As opposed to the above theory are the diffusionist schools which contend that the Dravidians entered India from the north-west at a remote age from their original home. According to the view put forward by Sir William Hunter there were two branches of the Dravidians, the Kolarians, speaking dialects allied to Mundari and the Dravidians proper whose languages belong to the Tamil family. The Dravidians according to this view found their way into the Punjab through the north-western passes and pressed forwards towards the south of India. Bishop R.Caldwell on a comparision of the grammars and vocabularies of the Scythian and Dravidian languages rushed

to the conclusion of a relationship between the Scythians and the Dravidians. However later investigations show that there were marked physical and mental differences between the two. The Mongolian origin of the Dravidians is based on the fanciful musings of V Kanakasabhai. According to him, they came to south India along the east coast of India in four bands, the earliest of whom he considers to be the Marar who founded the Pandyan kingdom. The second were the Thirayar tribe of the Cholas and the third were the Vanavar, a mountainous tribe from Bengal, who were the ancestors of the Chera kings; the fourth and last were the Kosar tribe of the Kongu country. In this way he accounts for the origin of the four ancient Tamil kingdoms.

In attributing a Mongolian origin to the Tamils, Mr Kanagasabhai relies partly on literary evidence and partly on the similarity of sound in certain words. For instance, he draws inferences from words like Tamralitti and Tamil, Mranmar and Maran, Koshan and Kosar etc. He has entirely ignored the testimony of archaeology, philology and anthropology. Sir H Risely in pointing these out however dismisses all theories which assign a trans-Himalayan origin to the Dravidians. According to the theory of the Elamite origin for the Dravidians, India was originally occupied by two batches of Elamite invaders, one taking the sea route by the Persian Gulf and settling on the West Coast of India and the other choosing the land route through the Bolan Pass and occupying North India. This theory gives the Dravidians a Mesopotamian abode in the remote past.

Exponents of the diffusionist theory like Professors W.J.Perry and Elliot Smith trace all civilised beginnings to an Egyptian and Mediterranean source. According to Prof.Perry, "Egypt was the home of civilization and the great source of inspiration for many centuries for the surrounding civilizations and that the culture of Sumer and Elam was Egyptian in origin"<sup>4</sup>. According to this school the main racial element in the Dravidian population is a branch of the Mediterranean race. The resemblances between the Mediterraneans and the Dravidians in the shape of skull, colour and texture of hair, colour of eyes, in features and build are striking. Those race marks of the Dravidians which are deviations from the Mediterranean type are explained by G.Slater on the hypothesis of inter-breeding of the Dravidian with other types in India. According to James Hornell, the proto-Dravidians were a Mediterranean people. These settled sometime in Mesopotamia and then came to India, the Brahui language in Baluchistan marking their presence there at one time. The

result of the fusion of the incomers with the older inhabitants -- the pre-Dravidian races -- is the Dravidians of the historic period. According to G.Slater, an improvement in the methods of hunting was the cause of the Dravidian migration to India. He adds that the Dravidians passed from some part of the Mediterranean basin through Mesopotamia and Baluchistan before entering India. He assigns this event to a period anterior to the dawn of the Sumerian civilisation. In the opinion of G Slater, "the Dravidian civilization and culture were evolved in India and mainly under the stimulus of the Indian environment though not without the operation of external influences".

According to Prof. Rapson, "the original speakers of the Dravidian languages were invaders. The survival of a Dravidian language in Baluchistan must indicate that the Dravidians came into India through Baluchistan in prehistoric times"<sup>6</sup>. Whether they are ultimately to be traced to a Central Asian or to a Western Asian origin cannot at present be decided with absolute certainty. The Indus Valley discoveries show that the Dravidian civilization bears a striking resemblance to the cultures of the Mediterranean area. This leads to the inference, in the opinion of some scholars that the original home of the ancient Dravidians should have been the Mediterranean region. Thus the Palaeo-Mediterraneans and Mediterraneans who are essentially long-headed people are supposed to have brought the Dravidian or proto-Dravidian speech into India. In support of this, it is pointed out that in Mesopotamia and around the Mediterranean, languages similar to the proto-Dravidian were in existence like the Sumerian in the 4th-3rd millennia BC. Lycians of Asia Minor in their inscriptions called themselves Dramila from which the term Tamil is supposed to have been derived. Susian and Dravidian have some close structural affinities. Place names along the entire route from Mesopotamia to India conform to Dravidian forms. The Hurrian and Kassite languages have also shown some affinities to the Dravidian. All these factors according to some scholars provide strong evidence to derive the Dravidian from the local region in Mesopotamia or further west, the eastern Mediterranean.

The discoveries made at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa have added a new dimension to the origins of the Dravidians as well as to Indian civilization. A new standpoint has emerged of surveying not only Indian culture but also Babylonian and Sumerian cultures. This revelation has more than archaeological interest as it concerns the history of civilizations. The details

of the Mohenjo-daro and Harappan civilization first came to light in 1921. The Indus Valley civilization as it is now referred to makes it one of the oldest civilizations along with the Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations. To what people and to what age do these antiquities belong? As Sir John Marshall observes, "Never for a moment was it imagined that five thousand years ago, before the Aryans were heard of, the Punjab and Sindh, if not other parts of India as well were enjoying an advanced and singularly uniform civilization that was closely akin to but in some respects superior to that of contemporary Mesopotamia and Egypt, yet this is what the discoveries of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro have placed beyond question. They exhibit the Indus peoples of the third and fourth millennia BC in possession of a highly developed culture in which no vestige of Indo-Aryan influence is to be found". Recent archaeological evidence especially from Mehrgarh has established that the Indus Civilization was essentially an indigenous development growing out of local cultures in an unbroken sequence from neolithic through chalcolithic to Early Harappan (circa 3600-2600), to the Mature Harappan or Indus Civilization between 2600-1800 BC when it collapsed into regional cultures. Professor Asko Parpola who has been studying the undeciphered Indus Script over thirty years with his colleagues in the University of Helsinki in his grand summary work "Deciphering the Indus Script" published in 1994 came to the conclusion that the language of the Indus people was Dravidian and they professed a religion that was genetically related to the religions of both the ancient West Asia and the later India. Hence it is found that the main God of the Hindus viz Siva is of Dravidian origin. As Sir John Marshall commenting on his findings states, "Among the many revelations that Mohenjo-daro and Harappa had in store for us, none perhaps is more remarkable than this discovery that Saivism ( ie Siva and Siva worship ) has a history going back to the chalcolithic or perhaps even further still and that it thus takes its place as the most ancient living faith in the world".

The other main hypothesis that has been put forward about the Indus script is called the Sanskrit hypothesis. As Indo-Aryan languages have been spoken in the area once occupied by the Indus civilization and gradually all over North India since at least 1000 BC, it is natural to assume that they were spoken there even earlier. But the Sanskrit hypothesis is however difficult to reconcile chronologically with the date of the now dated Indus Civilization (2600-1800 BC) and the antecedent Early Harappan cultures as the Vedic

Aryans entered India only in the second millennium BC. Hence recent researches by a strong minority of people have challenged the Aryan invasion of India theory as wrong. Most scholars, according to them, until now believed that it was a Dravidian speaking people who were driven out of the Indus Valley around 1800-1500 BC by the maurading Aryan tribes.\* They therefore assumed that the script of the Indus Valley to be an ancient form of a Dravidian language. But this minority group contends that all attempts to provide a Dravidian interpretation for the script have failed. Now Natwar Jha in his recently published book, "Vedic Glossary on Indus Seals" (November 1997) has proposed that the script is that of the Indus Valley people who were the ancestors of the people who live in India today. Accepting this point of view, Jha proceeded on the assumption that the ancient seals are in an ancient form of Sanskrit. It was long known that there was a correspondence between the Indus script and the characters in other ancient scripts. In an exercise of correlation, he compared all of the characters and sounds thereby producing a key to the reading of the ancient script. He found that the letters of most of the ancient scripts were related to the Indus signs. It remains to verify, however, this work. But for this theory to hold, it is necessary to debunk the Aryan invasion of India.

At about the same time, B.B. Lal in his book, "The Earliest Civilization of South Asia", also buries the "myth" of the Aryan invasion theory by exhuming India's antiquity. According to him, the maurading Aryans can no longer be held responsible for the destruction of the Indus Valley civilization. Perhaps climatic changes, environmental degradation and a steep fall in trade robbed the civilization of its affluence. According to Lal, the flourishing trade, affluence, social order and lifestyle of luxury attracted to the Indus Valley people from varied races and regions. Skeletons excavated indicate that the population consisted of Mediterraneans, Caucasoids, Armenoids, Alpines, Australoids and Mongoloids. The river Saraswati was a major river in the Vedas and the Indus Valley civilization. Long thought of as a mythical river, it has been recently re-discovered in the deserts of Rajasthan from satellite images. The sites at Kalibangan, for instance, were ruined around 1900 BC due to the drying up of the Saraswati, due probably to massive climatic changes. The Vedas must therefore date before that. Hence Sanskrit probably existed 2000 years before 1900 BC, given the fact that it takes two millenniums for a language to originate and develop to a level of versifying and composition in metres. Thus he seeks to establish the antiquity of

Sanskrit and its development in the Indus Valley without any external Aryan factor. In the process, there is a complete debunking of the theory of the Aryan invasion of India.

The Sanskrit hypothesis, however, fails not only to meet the difficulty of reconciliation chronologically, but also to answer the other arguments that the Indus civilization is Dravidian. The survival of Brahui, a Dravidian language, spoken even today by large numbers of people in Baluchistan and the adjoining areas of Afghanistan and Iran is an important factor in the identification of the Indus Civilization as Dravidian. Hence A.Parpola concludes that Brahui represents the remnants of the Dravidian language spoken in the area by the descendants of the Indus population. Again, the pervasive sub-stratum influence of Dravidian on old Indo-Aryan is also an important clue to the presence of Dravidian in the region. The presence of Dravidian loan-words in the Rigveda is now well recognised. The Rigveda has also phonological and syntactical features borrowed from Dravidian. Among the features listed by Parpola are the retroflex sounds, gerund, quotative and onomatopoeic constructions. Survival of place-names is generally a good indicator of the linguistic pre-history of a region. Parpola points out several place names in the region with good Dravidian etymologies. Hence the cumulative weight of evidence makes Dravidian the most likely language to have been spoken by the Indus people.

At the same time, the complete absence of the horse among the animals so prominently featured on the Indus seals is good evidence for the non-Aryan character of the Indus Civilization. The horse, as is known, was introduced by the Aryans and gave them a decisive advantage in their battles against the Dravidians. Parpola quotes from an authoritative report by Richard Meadow that there is as yet no convincing evidence for horse remains from archaeological sites in South Asia before the end of the second millennium BC. As Parpola points out the proto-Aryan words for the horse and the various technical terms associated with the war chariot can all be reconstructed to proto-Indo-European. This is good linguistic evidence that the Vedic horse and chariots are firmly rooted in the proto-Indo-European heritage. The evidence strongly suggests that the Indus culture was non-Aryan.

There is also a striking resemblance between the finds of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa and those of Adichchanallur and other pre-historic sites in South India. M.Lapicque arrived at the conclusion that the remains at Adichchanallur, 15 miles south-east of Tirunelvelly, belonged to a proto-Dravidian race. The burial urns and other articles of pottery resemble the finds of other South Indian places. At the time these urns were used, cremation must have been unknown and burial, the universal practice. This practice continued even into the historical period as well and can be seen by a careful study of Purapporulvembamalai, a Tamil literary work.. Some of the large earthenware urns excavated at Adichchanallur contained human skulls in a perfect condition. These skulls have been found, on being measured, to agree with the typical Tamil skull. It is therefore contended that the bronze and iron age culture of Adichchanallur is that of the early Dravidians. The Mohenjo-daro and Harappa culture agrees with that of Adichchanallur in burying the dead in a crouching position in terracotta coffins and in placing food, drink, apparel and weapons ready for their service. Hence the burial customs indicate that they too were early Dravidians. Given the view that the Dravidian civilization and culture evolved in India, it can be inferred that both the Dravidian Indus Valley civilization and the Dravidian Tamil civilization in South India mainly developed thereafter under the stimulus of their respective Indian environments.

As observed earlier, a new standpoint emerged of surveying Indian civilization with those of Babylonian and Sumerian. C.J.Gadd and Sydney Smith on examining, "the pottery, seals, stone and other objects of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa found a striking resemblance between the Sumerian antiquities of the period between 3000-2800 BC and those of India"<sup>9</sup>. The ethnic type of the Sumerians was so different from those of the races which surrounded them, while it bore the most resemblance to the Dravidian ethnic type. It is by no means improbable that the Sumerians were an Indian race which passed by land, perhaps by sea, through Persia to the valley of the Two Rivers. Thus Dr.Hall suggests that the Sumerians might be a branch of the Indian Dravidians perhaps of the Indus Valley. On the way, they left the seeds of their culture in Elam. In the opinion of Srinivasa Iyengar, "neolithic culture began in India 20,000 years ago and was widespread in all Indian river valleys. Elementary Dravidian / Tamil words are all monosyllables which can very well be represented by pictographic scripts described by Sir John Marshall"<sup>10</sup>. He believes that this neolithic culture went beyond India

possibly by sea and settled in ancient Assyria as the Sumerian culture whence the civilization of Chaldea sprang. The well known resemblances of facial features and speech between the present-day Tamils and the ancient Sumerians is therefore not accidental. Dr S.K. Chatterjee says, "It would be established ( provided Hall's theory of Sumerian origins be true ) that civilization first arose in India and was associated probably with the primitive Dravidians. Then it was taken to Mesopotamia to become the source of Babylonian and other ancient cultures which form the basis of modern civilizations"<sup>11</sup>. It would not be far wrong if we infer that South India gave refuge to the survivors of the deluge, that the culture developed in Lemuria was carried to South India after the former's submergence and South India was the cradle of the human race. Investigations into race and language show it to be possible that South India was once the passage ground by which the ancient progenitors of the Mediterranean races proceeded to parts of the globe which they now inhabit. Thus according to Sir John Evans, Southern India was probably the cradle of the human race. And we may, as with some writers, speak of a Dravidian migration from South to North instead of from North to South.

Our brief inquiry into the primeval home of the Dravidians has shown that there are two definite schools of thought emerging from the inconclusive debate. The arguments advanced on behalf of the indigenous theory are just as valid. At the same time, the profundity of scholarship and learning equally displayed by the advocates of the opposite view that the Proto-Dravidians came to India from outside is remarkable. In the circumstances one can only say that until future discoveries and dispassionate researches throw more light on the subject, the debate relating to the respective theories will have to be left open without a definitive conclusion for the present.



## CHAPTER IV

### EARLY DRAVIDIAN INDIA AND ARYAN MYTHS\*

Wherever may have been the primeval home of the ancient or proto-Dravidians, whether these peoples were indigenous to India or not, the fact is that the early Dravidians were widely diffused in India, long before the Aryan irruptions. As Shesha Iyengar says "the fact that several Dravidian dialects such as Brahui, Valli, Santal etc are found in the midst of other tongues in Baluchistan, Rajaputana and Central India respectively testifies to the once universal diffusion of the Dravidians in India". Again as seen earlier, T.Burrow states that "India was essentially a Dravidian speaking country before the Aryan influx"<sup>2</sup>. He has further clearly shown that the earliest strata of Vedic literature has a sub-stratum of Dravidian words. Although South India is today regarded as the home of the Dravidians, in India proper, it is nigh impossible to find any definite ethnological boundary between the Dravidians of the South and the other Indian people. Apart from certain primitive tribes referred to as pre-Dravidian or Adi-Dravidas, nearly all who speak the Dravidian languages and the vast numbers of other Indians who now speak the Sanskritic languages imposed upon them show a close racial affinity between themselves. The main racial element in the Dravidian population according to G.Slater is a branch of the Mediterranean race, if this term is understood in its extended sense. This is also the view of modern ethnologists. The resemblances in shape of skull, colour and texture of hair, colour of eyes, in features and build are striking. The most obvious difference is in the colour of skin which in the Dravidians is on average much darker and a larger proportion of faces with thick lips and broader noses. These deviations from the Mediterranean type are explained on the hypothesis that after the Dravidians entered India, some inter-breeding took place with the darker and thick-lipped primitive pre-Dravidian races still surviving in the jungles. Even if we accept the alternate view that the Dravidians were an autochthonously evolved people by an admixture of Veddic and Australoid elements locally, they still underwent certain physical transformations as a result of the change in their habitat and consequent changes in their cultural levels and habits. In much the same way, the

Dravidians in northern India were later on modified to a varying extent by admixtures of the Aryan, Scythian and Mongloid elements as well as changes in their habitats. The fact however is that the face-type of the average Indian of today is much the same as that of his Dravidian race-ancestors thousands of years ago. As G. Slater sums up, "the Dravidian element today preponderates over all other elements in the racial make-up of the people of India".<sup>3</sup>

The great obstacle to a right appreciation of the Dravidian civilization and its contribution to the evolution of Indian culture is the persistence of what may be called the "Aryan myth". The invading nomadic tribes called themselves Aryas, a word generally anglicized into Aryans. It was a Vedic or Hindu cult term. To this good old Vedic word "Arya", European Indologists attached different connotations. The German Sanskritists such as Max Mueller popularised initially the theory that an ancient "Aryan" race of men, superior to other races spread from their original "Aryan" home somewhere in Europe or Asia. They flowed down in various streams to India, Persia and Europe, fertilized those countries and sowed the seeds of civilization far and wide. All attempts to harmonise this theory with the facts broke down hopelessly and Max Mueller himself was brought to admit that language is no test of race.

The Aryan invasion of India was not a single concerted action, but one covering several centuries and involving many tribes, perhaps not all of the same race and language. Today anthropologists and ethnologists say that there never was a distinctive, pure Aryan race. The theory of a conquering, civilizing Aryan race is now completely discredited. As G. Slater sums up, the word "Aryan" is legitimate enough provided a definite meaning is attached to it as a name for the invaders from the north-west who introduced the Sanskrit language to India. Used in a linguistic sense, it also refers for example to a group of languages - the Indo-European languages. The nomadic tribes from the Asian steppes entered India in a series of exoduses. As G. Slater says, they must be regarded as relatively barbaric invaders but were provided with an immense advantage by their horses for military and political mastery over the Dravidian peoples. The latter lacked this equipment despite their superiority in those elements of culture which made for wealth and civilization. The Aryans no doubt brought other new culture elements besides the horse, among them the practice of burning the dead, associated ideas with regard to

life after death, the fire cult etc. These mingled with Dravidian beliefs without superseding them. A study of the Vedas ( the Hindu Scriptures ) reveals the fact that Vedic culture itself is so redolent of the Indian soil and of the Indian atmosphere that the idea of a non-Indian origin of that culture is totally absurd. As G. Slater again sums up, "while the Dravidians were Aryanised in language, the Aryans were Dravidised in culture".<sup>4</sup>

It is useful to know the word "Arya" in its original meaning as found in the Vedas before it was given its modern connotations by the European Indologists. The rishis ( seers ) of the Vedas used the word "Arya" without any racial implications and only in the sense of a people who followed the fire-cult as opposed to the fireless-cult. In Vedic times, two cults prevailed in India. The one followed by the Aryas to whom Sanskrit was the sacred tongue, the language of the Gods who made offerings to the Gods through Agni ( fire ) because they believed Agni to be the mouth of the Gods. The others - the Dasyus ( Dravidians ) whom the Aryas described as anagni, the fireless. Thus Arya was always in India a cult name, the name of a method of worship whose main characteristic was the lighting of the sacred fire. The Arya rites required the use of Sanskrit mantras which were promulgated by the ancient seers called Rishis; the Dasyu rites had no use for fire or the Sanskrit mantras or for a privileged class of priests to recite them. The term "Dasyus" was used by the Aryans to refer to the Dravidians and others who stood in the way of the Aryan advance. They became the natural foes of the Aryans. Hence the term was used in a denigrating sense. Nevertheless even according to the Vedic Hymns, the Dasyus had reached a high level of culture and civilization as these hymns refer to Dasyus as living in cities and under kings. They possessed accumulated wealth and owned property in the plains and on the hills. They were adorned with their array of gold and jewels. They owned many castles. The Dasyu "demons" and the Arya "gods" alike lived in gold, silver and iron castles. Thus the main distinction between the two was one essentially that of cult. Accumulated evidence of pre-historic antiquities proves that even before the spread of the Arya fire-cult, the Dravidians had reached a high level of culture and civilization.

The influence of the Dravidian civilization on the culture of India is often ignored. But the truth is that the Dravidians had already developed a civilization of their own, long before the Aryan influx. The division of society among the Dravidians shows that at a remote age they had emerged

from savagery to a peaceful and settled life for centuries. Their civilization was more ancient than that of the Aryans; for among the latter the fighting men were next in rank to the priests, whereas among the Dravidians the farmers were next to the religious men and the military class was below that of the herdsmen and artisans. As we had seen, the Dravidians had already established kingdoms in the north as well as the south of the country. There existed well established communities. As G.Slater says, "we should esteem Dravidian culture above the Aryan culture at the time of the Aryan irruption into India since the latter was associated with war while the former was associated with peaceful industry". The early Dravidians were not primitive tribes but tilled the ground and raised various crops eg. rice and sesamum. The names "marutham" ( மருதம் ), the land where paddy and other grains are cultivated with the aid of irrigation and of paddy "nel" ( நெல் ) are Dravidian terms. The term rice, ( அளிசி ) was not known to the Aryans at the time of their first appearance in India. This is seen by the absence of any mention in the Rigveda of rice. As Sir John Hewitt says, "the Dravidians were of all the great races of antiquity the first to systematise agriculture". Archaeology also confirms the evidence obtained from tradition, literature and language as regards the engagement of the ancient Dravidians in agriculture. As seen from the Adichchanallur and other megalithic finds, the people who used the burial urns must have been an agricultural race as brass and iron implements of agriculture were often buried in their graves.

The early Dravidians had made much progress in industrial arts. They worked in metals. The Dravidian name for a smith "karuma" from which the vedic "karmara" is probably borrowed meant a smelter. Their artificers made ornaments of gold, pearls and of precious stones. The Adichchanallur remains consisted of bronze figures of a variety of domestic animals and of fillets of gold beaten very thin. These afford conclusive proof of the artistic development of the Dravidians in pre-historic times. In the field of commerce, the activity of the Dravidians is most remarkable. South India, the home of the ancient Dravidians was the heart and centre of the old world for ages. It was one of the foremost maritime countries. As Sinha and Banerjee observe, "The Dravidians in pre-historic times navigated the seas in pursuit of trade and commerce". The greatest achievement of the Dravidians was the art of navigation. There are Sanskrit borrowings of several nautical terms from the Dravidian language. The Dravidian name for ship "oda" for instance is an original Dravidian word. It is believed that regular maritime intercourse

existed between South India and Western Asia before the 8th century BC. The Dravidians traded with the ancient Chaldeans before the Vedic language found its way into India. Indian teak was found in the ruins of Ur and it must have reached there from South India in the fourth millennium BC when it was the seaport of Babylon and the capital of the Sumerian kings. "This particular tree grows in South India where it advances close to the Malabar Coast". This shows how advanced and enterprising the Dravidians were even as early as 4000 BC. As S.V.Venkateswara says " It was left to the Dravidians to develop the shipping and maritime activities of India".

The ancient Dravidians reached a high level of development in the domain of religion. There was a period in hoary antiquity when the indigenous Dravidian religion with its forms of sacrifices, prophesies and frenzied dances was alone in vogue. But deep down in this primitive system buried beneath a mass of rites, there has been a deep craving of the human heart for communion with God. It is no wonder therefore that even in this primitive period there took place considerable development in the religious ideas and beliefs of the Dravidian peoples. Those Vedic Gods, the etymology of whose names is not patent and who have no analogues in other Indo-Germanic dialects were Dravidian deities. In the words of Sir Charles Elliot, "it would be more correct to describe the Indian religion as Dravidian religion stimulated and modified by the foreign invaders". For the greatest deities of Hinduism such as Siva, Vishnu and Durga and some of the essential doctrines such as metempsychosis and divine incarnations are either totally unknown to the Veda or obscurely adumbrated by it. As has been pointed out Vedic culture itself is so redolent of the Indian soil that the idea of a non-Indian origin of that culture is totally absurd. Furthermore, in various neolithic settlements in Southern India, there have been found several lingams. That itself is ample evidence according to Srinivasa Iyengar of the fact that worship of Siva in the form of the lingam existed in the Stone Age which certainly preceded the Vedic Age. Again the Indus Valley civilization has shown the existence of Siva worship. It is therefore clear that the Dravidian deities of yore were assimilated with the Vedic deities of the Aryans and a fusion took place between the two religions. To unite the Aryan with the Dravidian, it became necessary to combine the individual sky gods of the Aryans with the cosmic nature divinities of the Dravidians including Siva and Uma, Vishnu and Skanda.

As seen earlier, Dravidian and Aryan interaction took place not only in religion but also in language. The debt of Sanskrit to the Dravidian languages is often acknowledged but without referring to the influence of Dravidian on the Aryan speech. As Dr S.K.Chatterjee observed, "There has been through some 3000 years a gradual approximation of the Aryan speech towards the Dravidian in its system of sounds, in its trend in morphology, in vocabulary and above all its sounds or order of words"<sup>11</sup>. It is clear from the foregoing that the Dravidians possessed a genius and individuality of their own. They made great contributions to the development of Indian civilization and culture. It was out of the harmonious commingling of cultures of the Dravidian and Aryan that the Indian and Hindu civilization of the present day has evolved. Just as Greek civilisation and culture influenced ancient Rome to produce the Graeco-Roman civilisation which is the basis of today's Western culture, so too it may be said that the Dravidian civilisation and culture influenced Aryavartta (Land of the Aryas ) to produce a Dravidian-Aryan civilisation which forms the basis of the Indian and Hindu culture of today.

Of the early Dravidian peoples that should be of interest to us are the Rakshasas and Nagas. The Rakshasas of the ancient Indian poems were earlier believed to be superhuman beings and possessed of miraculous powers. They were said to have occupied the southern parts of India and Lanka ( Patalam ) ( பாதலம் ). By the time the Ramayana came to be composed, they were regarded as a highly civilised people. In the Ramayana, they thus stand out as the main obstacle to Rama in his campaigns against Lanka, as they formed "a compact population, brave, stubborn and strongly organised". As the Ramayana mentions, " Such the Dravidians are now, when they number over twenty-eight millions south of the Vindhya.. " Valmiki in his Ramayana also describes Lankapuri as the beautiful metropolis of Ravana, king of Lanka and the Rakshasas. The poet extolls the beauty and grandeur of Lanka, its architectural splendour and the efficiency of its administration. The Rakshasas were worshippers of Siva and Siva only. The Aryan worship of the natural phenomena and their unmeaning sacrifices appeared to the Rakshasas to be sacreligious. King Ravana was a Siva devotee and it is said that he always carried with him a golden lingam which he worshipped with incense and flowers. According to the Ramayana account, although Ravana was killed, Rama did not exterminate the Rakshasas. Instead, Vibishana the younger brother of Ravana, a good and

devout worshipper of Vishnu was appointed sovereign of Lanka in place of Ravana. And there ends the story as far as Lanka is concerned.

According to M Srinivasa Aiyangar, "The Ramayana is a quasi-historical epic poem which describes the migration of the Aryans to Southern India prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC "<sup>12</sup>. The events mentioned in the Ramayana, it is said, took place between the 24<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC. The Ramayana of Valmiki, in which Rama is described as a national hero—a typical Aryan of noble, pure and sublime life—appears to have been recast with additions according to M. Srinivasa Aiyangar. In fact Rama and Ravana were regarded as historical personages till we come to the Puranic period ( 8-6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) when following the impetus given to Vaishnavism attempts were made to deify Rama as an avatar of Vishnu. Patalam was occupied by tribes whom Valmiki called Rakshasas, Yakshas and Vanaras (monkeys), because of their strange features and customs. Both the Rakshasas and the Yakshas belonged to the same race of people called Yatudanas in the Vedas. The Rakshasas were thus equated with the Yakshas by some, though the latter were also seen by others separately as the followers of the God of Wealth, Kubera. They are however both regarded as one another's kinsmen as Kubera is referred to also as an uncle of Ravana. Like the Rakshasas, the Yakshas too occupied southern India and Lanka. As K.R. Subramaniam says, "Yakshas are mentioned in the Brahmi inscriptions in Pandya (200 BC). Early Malabar and Travancore inscriptions mention many petty rulers with Yaksha names"<sup>13</sup>. The Yakshas were denigrated into Yakkas (demons) in the Pali chronicles. But even the Pali chronicles show that they occupied a greater part of Lanka in pre-historic times as we shall see later.

Unlike the Yakshas, as seen from quasi-historical and historical sources, the Nagas were a widely distributed people in ancient India. Though 'naga' in Sanskrit means cobra, the Nagas were in India long before the advent of the Aryan tribes. So how did the Nagas acquire this appellation? Naga also means hill as well as a tree. The legendary Naga people must have been hill and forest tribes. A likely explanation of the name may be found in the cult of the "tree and the serpent"—a universal primitive cult. So the term Naga must have had primarily a totemistic significance. After the cults of Siva and Vishnu spread, several people remained Naga worshippers ( cobra worshippers ) without joining these cults and thus became separated from the rest. According to G.Slater, that cobra worship was dominant among the

Dravidians in the Vedic period is shown by the term Naga gradually superseding the other names used in Sanskrit literature for the Dravidians. This also clearly shows that the Nagas were a Dravidian people. As cobra worshippers they came to be referred to as Nagas by the Sanskrit writers and this term stuck. However it is necessary to distinguish between the Nagas of South and Central India from their north-eastern namesakes; the latter were probably Turanian or Scythian immigrants from Central Asia belonging to the Mongolian race.

As for the South Indian Nagas, according to V. Kanakasabhai, "there were several tribes of them such as the Maravar, Eyinar, Oliyar, Oviyar, Aruvalur and Parathavar"<sup>14</sup>. The Nagas however lived everywhere in ancient India. There is no place in India without its Naga stories. The Vedas, the Epics and Buddhist literature all make reference to them. By that time, the Nagas had advanced to a high level of culture to be regarded as a civilised race. Again according to Kanakasabhai, some of the earliest semi-barbarous tribes were conquered by the Nagas, a more numerous and civilised people. So much so that quite early in pre-history, they had established kingdoms in India, Lanka, Burma and Chavakam ( Java ). In South India, Malabar is regarded as the headquarters of the Nagas. This is not surprising as the Dravidian term for naga was chera or sera. Malabar is still the part of India where Naga worship prevails on a large scale. The Nayars ( Nairs ) of today may probably be the Nagas of ancient times. According to the Ramayana, the Naga capital lay in the heart of the Deccan. In the time of the Mahabharata, there were Naga kingdoms between the Jumna and the Ganges, while the Lankan chronicles refer to Nagadipa and Kalyani ( Kelaniya ) as Naga kingdoms in Lanka before the advent of the mythical Vijaya. In the recollection of the Tamil poets, there was no kingdom older than that of the Nagas. Kaviripaddinam the capital of the Cholas is said to have been an ancient seat of the Nagas. It can thus be inferred that the Nagas appeared on the scene before the Tamils. That the Nagas were widely diffused in India at that time can be seen from the place names that have come down to us, such as Nagarcoil ( in the southern extremity of India), Nagapattinam ( on the Coromandel coast ) and Nagpur ( in Central India ).

The fact that the Nagas were in possession of an advanced civilization could be inferred from the Tamil words beginning with "naga"; thus civilization is "nagarikam" ( நாகர்கம் ); the word for town or city is "nagaram" ( நாகரம் ).

Being town-dwellers, they were skilled in many arts especially weaving. The Nagas of Kalinga were so skilled in the art of weaving that the word "kalingam" in Tamil has come to signify a cloth. Thus the Sirupanarruppadaai, a Tamil literary work, refers to the following:

நீல நாகன் நல்கிய கலிங்கம்

(The fine cloth (kalingam) presented by Nilan of the Naga tribe).

The fine muslins manufactured by the Nagas were highly prized by the Tamils and fetched fabulous prices in foreign countries. They also cultivated the fine arts. Thus the flute which the Tamils use and with which they render the Tamil ragas so exquisitely is called the "nagasinnam" ( நாகசின்னம் ). They had a writing and spoke a dialect akin to early Tamil. It was from the Nagas that the Aryans first learnt the art of writing; hence the Sanskrit characters are to this day known as "deva-nagari". According to Srinivasa Iyengar, "the speech of the Nagas was not Tamil but it was not impossible for a Tamil man to master it"<sup>15</sup>. Apparently the ancient Dravidian language which the Tamils spoke, according to V Kanakasabhai, did not differ from the dialect of the Nagas who were also a Dravidian tribe. In course of time, the Dravidian language which the Tamils spoke was developed and refined to become the language of the Tamils and to be known as Tamil. As we have seen, the Naga speech being a dialect, the Naga elite too became well-versed in Tamil. As mentioned by K.R.Subramaniam, "There are a large number of poets mentioned in Sangam literature whose names end in Naga. Thus we have for instance Naganar, Ilanaganar, Vennagar etc in Narrinai; Theenmathi Nagan, Nagampothan, Ponnagan etc in Kurunthogai ; Nannaganar, Poothan Ilanagan, Vellaikudi Naganar etc in Purananuru . Out of ten who set the pieces of Paripadal to music, five call themselves Nagas"<sup>16</sup>. Thus according to the Madras Government Epigraphist (1911), the account of the epic hero Arjuna marrying a Naga princess and similar accounts of early Chola kings in Tamil literature, combined with what is stated of Naga connections with the first Pallava kings confirm the belief that the Nagas were indigenous rulers of South and Central India. In course of time they were subdued by more powerful kings, and eventually lost their individuality as a group of people by intermarriages and fusion with the Tamils and others.

However, significantly to emerge from the proto-Dravidian tribes at an early stage with an advanced culture were the Tamils to whom we shall turn to in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER V

### EARLY TAMILS AND TAMIL KINGDOMS OF SOUTH INDIA

Little is known of the earliest history of South India as that of ancient India. It is a singular fact as Bishop Caldwell observes that, "the Hindus though fond of philosophy and poetry, mathematics and fine arts seemed never to have cared anything for history as such". In the absence of recorded historical source materials, a reconstruction of a political history of the early Tamil kingdoms has proven to be a daunting task. Other source materials such as archaeological finds and inscriptions as well as foreign accounts and literary sources have been used. While further archaeological excavations and researches await to be done, the main source yet remains the rich ancient Tamil literature that has survived. Thus scholars and historians alike have dealt more with the social history of the early Tamil people as gleaned from the epic poems and literature of the Tamils. The early history of the Tamil kings is lacking in chronology and dynasties until just before the Christian era.

While the Tamils are the direct descendants of the Dravidians, the etymology of the word Tamil as well as the origin of the Tamils, as we have seen, are yet questions which await definitive answers. As we have seen, the word Tamil and Dravidian is often used interchangeably. On the etymology of the word "Tamil", some scholars observe that Tamila or Tamlah seem to indicate a derivation from Tamra or Tamraparni, a river in the Tinnevelly District in South India which is regarded as the earliest civilised settlement of Tamils. On the otherhand, this conjecture seems to be founded merely on the analogy of the two words. V Kanakasabhai speaks of Mongolian tribes who emigrated from Tamalitti ( Sanskrit=Tamralipti ) in present day Bengal. He concludes that "the word Tamil appears to be therefore only an abbreviation of the word Tamilitti". These attempts to give the Tamils an origin from across the Himalayas and Bengal have been altogether dismissed as fanciful. We have seen earlier how S.K Chatterjee sought to derive the term Tamil from the old Dravidian word Dramila. Again G.Oppert derived it from Tiru

mala -- the sacred tongue of the forest tribes, the Malas, Mallas Malayas etc. In the dictionary entitled the Sulamani Nigandu, the word Tamil besides being a proper name stands for inimi ( sweetness ) and neermi ( harmony ), references no doubt to the characteristics of the Tamil language. As for the country assigned to the Tamils in the Nigandu, the Hindu geographers have designated one of the fifty-six desas and given it the Sanskrit appellation "Dravida" or "Dravira" ( Southern ). The Tamils have changed this to Tiravidam ( திரவிடம் ) or Tiramudum conformably to the orthography of their language. As pointed out earlier, attempts by some to derive Tamil from Dravida makes no sense given the antiquity of the Tamil people and their language. The fact is that the word Tamil occurs in all the ancient classics as the common or generic name to denote the language, the people and their country. That part of the Indian peninsula which the Indo-Aryans called Dravida was known to the ancient Tamils as Tamil-akam ( தமிழ் - அகம் ) or the abode of the Tamils.

Whether the original or proto-Dravidian tribes entered South India from the south from Lemuria after the deluge or entered India from the north-west and spread downwards, the home of Tamil culture and civilization was in South India or more precisely Tamilakam ( தமிழகம் ) ( the Tamil country ). Hence Tamil tradition does not speak of a home for the Tamils outside Tamilakam. Early Dravidian society was organised in tribes and villages. There is evidence of the regular institutions of Dravidian autonomous villages. The structure of society gleaned from the earliest extant Tamil work, the Tolkaappiyam, (circa 4th century BC) reveals five different communities living apart and following their own vocations such as the agricultural tribes (marutamakkal), semi-agricultural tribes ( kurinchimakkal ), pastoral tribes (mullaimakkal ), fishing tribes (neithalmakkal ) and hunting tribes (palaimakkal ). These existed, it may be inferred, even before Telugu, Canarese and Malayalam separated from their parent Tamil stock as the same names and vocations as among the Tamils were found among the others. The five territorial divisions that corresponded to the five different communities were marutham ( மருதம் ) ( plains ), kurinchi ( குரிஞ்சி ) ( hill ), mullai (மூல்லை ) ( between hill and plain ), neithal ( நெய்தல் ) ( sea-shore ) and palai ( பாலை ) ( waste or arid land ) The Tolkaappiyam refers to the four occupational groups with their duties viz arasar ( rulers ), parpar ( brahmins ), vanikar ( merchants ) and vellalar ( agriculturists ). The Aryan theory which

maintained that mankind is divided into four varnas or groups of caste such as brahman, kshatriya, vaisya and sudra was wholly foreign to the Tamils. Caste was non-existent and there is no reference to the term sudra in the whole of the Tolkappiyam. Thus grew without a history, the Tamils of the earliest ages. Their gradual rise in the scale of civilization can be traced from their language and from discoveries of their pre-historic culture. They first emerge into history when traces of their trade are noticed in the Vedas and the earliest historical documents of the world -- the inscriptions of the Mesopotamian Valley. In the time of the Ramayana, but more so by the time the events in the Mahabharata took place circa 15<sup>th</sup> century BC , the Tamil kingdoms had already come into existence. The Mahabharata refers to the three Tamil kingdoms of Pandya, Chera and Chola and their kings are said to have assisted the Pandavas in the Great War.

Pamil tradition has it that the three kings "Muventhar" ( முவேந்தர் ) as they were called by the Tamils, ie the Chera, Chola and Pandya dynasties reigned in Tamil-land from time immemorial. According to Srinivasa Iyengar, Chera, Chola and Pandya were Tamil tribal names; the Cheras were Kuravar (hunters ), Cholas Vellalars ( farmers ) and the Pandyas Paradvavar ( coast people ). Of the three dynasties, the Pandya dynasty ruled in the heartland of the Tamil country. Unlike the Chola country which was marutham (agricultural ) and Chera country which was mostly kurinji ( hill country ), Pandya country contained all five tinnais ( regions) where the five kinds of love poetry and the five kinds of war poetry could arise. It is no wonder then, that Mathurai was the centre of growth of Tamil literature, the place of the Tamil Sangams ( Academies ) and where the literary dialect of Tamil (Senthamil ) was fashioned. According to Tamil legends, Pandyan, Cholan and Cheran were three brothers who at first lived and ruled in common at Korkai, near the mouth of the Tamraparni river. The lands held by all three in common were at Mukkani ( முக்காணி ) ( the three properties ) near Korkai. Eventually a separation took place.Pandyan stayed at home; Cholan and Cheran went forth to seek their fortunes and founded kingdoms of their own to the north and west respectively. It may be noted here that from the time the Tamils gained mastery of South India , they began to influence the course of Lanka's history as well.

With the establishment of kingdoms, the head of State came to be a hereditary monarch. His power was restricted though by the five councils

which were known as the "Five Great Assemblies". They consisted of the representatives of the people, priests, physicians, astrologers and ministers. The council of the peoples' representatives safeguarded the rights and privileges of the people; the priests directed all religious ceremonies; the physicians attended to all matters relating to health; the astrologers fixed auspicious times for public ceremonies and predicted important events; the ministers attended to the collection of revenue and its expenditure and the administration of justice. It is most remarkable that this system of Government was followed in the three kingdoms of Pandya, Chola and Chera although they were independent of each other. The principal officers of State were the high priest, the chief astrologer, the ministers and the commanders of the army. There were special officers appointed to perform the duties of judges and magistrates but the king was the supreme and final dispenser of justice.

The whole of the country called India today was then known as Jambudvipa or "the Land of the Rose Apple". In Jambudvipa, the region south of the Vindhya was called Dakshinapatha ( Southern Side ) and the extreme of the peninsula which was occupied by the Tamil people was Tamilakam or the abode of the Tamils. The boundaries of Tamilakam was always the same, as seen from the Tholkappiyam. Tholkapiyar, a Tamil grammarian of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC fixes the boundaries thus:

வட வேங்கடந் தென்குமி யாயினைத்  
தமிழ் சுறு நல்லு லகம்.

(The good world of the Tamils which lies between the northern Venkatam and the southern Kumari).

Lanka was referred to as Ilankai or Elam by the Tamils. Between Ilankai and Jambudvipa was the island of Manipallavam (mentioned in the Manimekalai ) or Naganadu ( Jaffna Peninsula ). Beyond some islands in the East occupied by Nagas was Chavakam ( Java ) a large kingdom, the capital of which was Nagapuram. What is most remarkable is that the language spoken in Chavakam appears to be Tamil.

Tamilakam was divided into thirteen nadus or provinces. Of these, Pandinadu was considered the most important region of the Pandyan kingdom. The chief city was Mathurai, the capital of the kingdom. It appears to have been called so after the sacred city of Muttra on the banks of the Jumna, hence the

appellation "Thakkana Mathurai" ( தெற்கன மதுரை ) ( Southern Mathurai ) given to it by Tamil poets of this age. The Pandyan king called himself Panchavan, descendant of the five Pandus of the Mahabharata fame. It is evident that by the adoption of this name they meant to claim kindred with the celebrated Pandu or Pandava brothers. Before this relationship was thought of, Maran and not Pandyan appears to have been the most ancient name of the head of this dynasty. The Pandyas were renowned as the most powerful kings of this time and munificent patrons of poets. The eastern coast extending from Cape Kumari ( Cape Comorin ) was inhabited by a tribe called Paradavar ( sailors and fishermen ). Korkai, the chief town in Then-Pandi ( South Pandi ) was the seat of the pearl fishery and the population consisted of pearl divers and chank-cutters. The pearl fishery was a source of such large revenue to the Pandyan kingdom that the heir apparent usually resided there. The river here is the Tamraparni ( also known as Sembil in Tamil and Solen to Ptolemy ). Of the inland towns mentioned by Ptolemy, the Greek Geographer ( AD 130 ), Selour may be identified with Seyaloor which is frequently alluded to in Tamil poems. The sea between Ilankai and the Pandyan coast was known as Arkali ( அக்ளலி )( the Orgalic Gulf of Ptolemy ). The chief town on this coast was the famed port of Saliur ( Salour of Ptolemy ).

North of the Pandyan kingdom lay the country of Vaduvar or vedar ( the Batoi of Ptolemy ) which was known as Panri-nadu ( Land of Pigs ), the capital of which was Nagai or Nagapattinam. Beyond Panri-nadu was the Chola kingdom or Punal Nadu. The name Punal-nadu signifies the land of floods. The province which comprised the land around the mouth of the Kaviri river was so called because it was subject to floods. The Chola capital was Uraiyoor; it is still known as Uraiyoor and is a suburb of the modern town of Thiruchinapalli. A town of even greater importance than Uraiyoor was the port city of Kaviripaddinam which stood at the mouth of the river and was a great emporium of trade. It was also known as Puhar or Kakanthi. Near the beach in Maruvur-pakkam ( Foreigners' Section ) were godowns and warehouses. Here goods were stamped with the tiger stamp ( the emblem of the Chola kings ) after payment of customs duties. All the articles prepared in Egypt for the markets of Tamilakam as well as all the produce of Tamilakam and the neighbouring countries were gathered there. Thus as Kanakasabhai puts it, "the produce of the regions watered by the Ganges, all that is grown on the banks of the Kaviri, articles of food from Lanka and the

manufactures of Kalakam ( in Burma ) were brought to the markets of Kaviripaddinam"<sup>3</sup>. The palace of the Chola king is described as a magnificent building in the Silappathikaram, a Tamil epic poem. There were splendid temples to the deities of the Hindu pantheon as well as some Buddhist viharas. On the fort gates of the city were painted the figures of the leaping tiger which as stated already was the ensign of the Cholas.

Five nadus or provinces formed the Chera kingdom, the capital of which was Vanchi or Karur. It was situated on the banks of the Periyar river or Porunai. The town in its heyday was a strongly fortified place which included the king's palace, a Vishnu temple, a Buddhist Chaitya and a Nigrantha monastery. Near the mouth of the river Periyar was Muchiri, an important sea port, described by a poet ( Erukaddai Thayankannanar ) as follows: "The thriving town of Muchiri where the beautiful large ships of the Yavanas ( Greeks ) bringing gold come splashing the white foam on the waters of the Periyar which belongs to the Cherala and return laden with pepper". Thondi was another flourishing seaport on the western coast. Nelkunda the town from which pepper was exported to Vaikkrai ( Bakarei of Ptolemy ), modern Kottayam appears to be Nirkunram. The region Kottanara where pepper was grown for export was Kuddanadu. South of Vaikkrai is the country of Aioi, the territory of the Ay family of chiefs of the Pothya hills and great patrons of poets. Cape Kumari at the southern tip was a sacred bathing place. Brahmin priests came from Varnasi ( Benares ) to bathe in Kumari and absolve their sins.

From the earliest times, the products of Tamilakam have attracted the merchants of distant lands. Not only is this trade referred to in Tamil poems and literature but also in foreign accounts. Prof Sayce refers to the existence of commerce between South India and Babylon as early as 3000 BC by finding Indian teak in the ruins of the city of Ur. It was most probably that during the reign of King Solomon about 1000 BC that "once every three years, the ships of Tarshishi came bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks"<sup>4</sup>. The names of the last two objects "kapim" and "tukim" as found in the Hebrew Bible are the same as those still used in Tamil ie "kavi" and "thokai". Subsequently, the Greeks and the Romans kept up this trade with Tamilakam. The Greek names for rice ( oryza ), ginger ( zingiber ) and cinnamon ( karpion ) are almost identical with the Tamil names "arisi", "inchiver", and "karuva" and clearly indicate that Greek merchants conveyed

these articles and their names to Europe from Tamilakam. The Egyptian Greeks under the Ptolemies carried on an extensive trade in Indian commodities and Alexandria became an emporium of trade. The Romans who conquered Egypt were not slow to take advantage of this profitable trade thereafter. Pliny, the Roman writer describes in detail the navigation to India as practised in his day. The author of the Periplus also gives a detailed account. The western merchants who visited Tamilakam were known as Yavanas, derived from Iaones meaning the Greek nation. In ancient Tamil poems, the name was exclusively applied to the Greeks and Romans. The Yavanas referred to were originally the Egyptian Greeks who brought wine, brass, lead, glass etc and purchased from the ports in Tamilakam pepper, ivory, pearls and fine muslins. The Pandyan king was the first to realise the benefits of an alliance with the Romans and sent two embassies to Augustus Caesar. Roman soldiers were enlisted in the services of the Pandyas and other Tamil kings. There was a colony of Greek merchants at Kaviripaddinam in the second century AD while the Roman settlement in Mathura probably continued till about 450 AD. As stated by Pliny, the trade was of such a magnitude that it drained the Roman Empire of 55 million sesterces in a year, but the wares which were purchased were sold for 100 times their original value. That Roman gold poured into the Tamil country at this time is attested by the numerous Roman coins dating from the reign of Augustus to that of Zeno ( BC 27-AD 49 ).

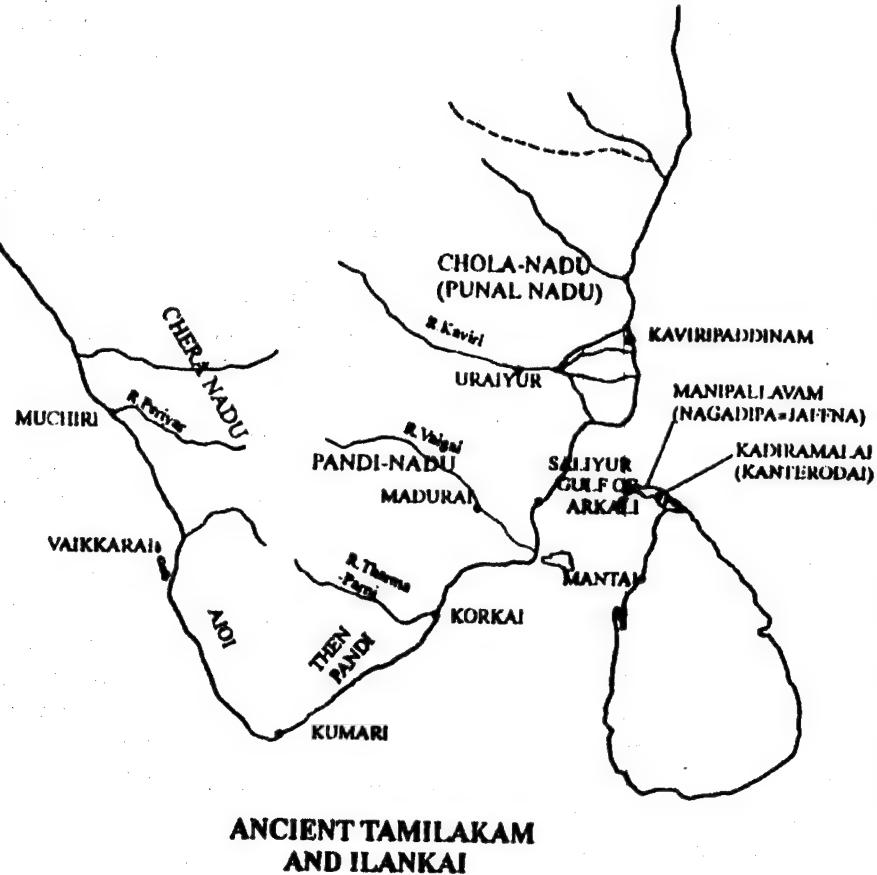
As Vincent Smith has observed, " Ancient Tamil literature and the Greek and Roman authors prove that in the first two centuries of the Christian era the ports on the Coromandel or Chola coast enjoyed the benefits of active commerce with the West and East. The Chola fleets did not confine themselves to coasting voyages but boldly crossed the Bay of Bengal to the mouths of the Ganges and the Irrawady ( in Burma ) and the Indian Ocean to the islands of the Malay Archipelago ". Of the trade with the eastern nations, though no detailed accounts are available, there are references in Tamil poetry as well to voyages undertaken by merchants and others to Nagapuram in Chavakam ( Java ), Kalakam ( in Burma ) and sea-ports of Ilankai and Bengal. From a study of Manimekalai, it may be inferred that the Tamils, even before the Christian era, traded with the islands of Sumatra, Java and Malaya. As for Ilankai, there was a thriving trade not only between the Tamil ports in South India with those in north-western Lanka but also through them and directly with the Mediterranean. This is attested to by the unearthing of

Roman coins in Mantai and Kanterodai. As observed by K M de Silva, "Tamil and other literary sources point to substantial urban and trading centres in South India in the third century BC. Very probably there were trade relations between them and Sri Lanka and very probably the island's trade with the Mediterranean world was through these South Indian ports". In fact traders from the Mediterranean were content to receive the island's products in South India. This state of affairs changed later on and according to Cosmas, Lanka also became an entrepot for the trade which moved across the Indian Ocean between East and West.

It is well known that there existed communication by land and sea between the furthest east of China and the utmost south of India. The existence in the Tamil language of pure Tamil words like kadal, paravai, punari, arkali and munnir all of which refer to the sea and kalam, marakalam, mithavai and kappal all of which denote a ship proves that the Tamils from the earliest times were a sea-faring people. Ancient palm-leaf (olai) manuscripts reveal that there were manuals in Tamil on the art of ship-building. H. Diolet speaking of the maritime activity of the Tamils and their early contact with the West as well as the East says that "they had known at one and the same time the civilization of the West and the civilization of China, thanks to their familiarity with the sea".



## DRAVIDIAN PEOPLES IN PRE-HISTORIC LANKA



The pre-history of the peoples of Lanka=Ilankai before the advent of the mythical Vijaya must necessarily be re-constructed on the basis of the available evidence and antiquities that have come to light .As recorded Lankan source materials give only scarce details, the main sources of evidence will have to be found in archaeological excavations, inscriptions and unearthed artefacts as well as from South Indian materials. It has been acknowledged that there is need for more archaeological and other research to be done in Lanka. Until that is done, the beginnings of man's story in Lanka and the dates and development of the earliest Dravidian settlements in the island cannot be sketched in great detail. However, it can be said, without any fear of contradiction, on the basis of existing evidence that there were settlements of Tamils in the island from pre-historic and proto-historic times. As we have seen, there is more than sufficient evidence to prove the presence of Tamils in the island from those times. At the same time it can be shown that other Dravidian peoples had also occupied the island from pre-historic times. These peoples were the Rakshasas and Yakshas (referred to as Yakkas in the Pali Chronicles) and the Nagas. Again, if by history is meant the story of the rise and fall of royal dynasties or kingdoms, there would be no political history in this sense in pre-historic times. But if by history is also meant a history of the evolution of the social and cultural life of these early Dravidian peoples, such a reconstruction is possible and is what is sketched out here.

The Rakshasas, Yakshas and Nagas could not have come to Lanka from anywhere else except South India. If Lanka was the abode of the Rakshasas, so parts of South India were according to the Ramayana and other Indian tradition. If Lanka was the abode of the Yakshas ( Yakkas ) and Nagas, according to the Mahavamsa and the other Pali chronicles, so parts of South and Central India were according to various other Indian accounts. The nether regions were assigned to the Rakshasas and the Yakshas by the Puranas and so South India and Lanka being the farthest land limits of India must have appealed to the northern imagination as Patala ( Patalam in Tamil ). That all

these peoples were of Dravidian origin goes without saying as they had imbibed the culture of the Indus Valley civilization. It may be mentioned that amongst the excavated remains of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa by Sir John Marshall, a devotee with a Nagahood over his head indicating his Naga lineage was also unearthed. Again, there is no question of their belonging to the Aryan tribes, as they inhabited India long before the Aryan influx into India. It is probable that when these early Dravidian tribes first entered India, they encountered the pre-Dravidian aboriginal and Austroloid peoples. As observed by R.Sewell, " at some remote period the aborigines of Southern India were overcome by hordes of Dravidian invaders and driven to the mountains and desert tracts where their descendants are to be found"<sup>1</sup>. It is known that some intermingling did as well take place. At the same time, it did lead to an exodus of some of these tribes across the shallow straits to Lanka. As H.Parker observes, "it may be concluded that the advance of the Dravidians to the south of India which may have occurred before the entry of the Aryans into the north-western regions, may have eventually led to an exodus of an aboriginal and probably pre-Dravidian hunting and fishing tribes across the shallow strait that separates Ceylon and India"<sup>2</sup>. It could be inferred that some of these early Dravidian tribes such as the Rakshasas, Yakshas and Nagas were themselves not slow in pursuit in following these tribes into Lanka. More so, if at that time South India and Lanka were one land mass.

By the time the Ramayana came to be composed, the Rakshasas had come to be regarded as human beings and were represented as occupying Lanka, under the rule of their king Ravana. It is said that the Rakshasa king, Ravana, by means of years of austerity was able to obtain the boon of indestructibility by all beings of a higher class than man. This enabled him to re-occupy Lanka by deposing Kubera, the God of Wealth and his attendants the Yakshas. (Here the Yakshas are seen as the followers of Kubera the God of Wealth). Due to his "intolerable misdeeds", at the request of the sages deities, Vishnu became incarnate as Rama, the son of Dasaratha, king of Ayodhya to destroy Ravana. Rama however on defeating Ravana and killing him did not exterminate the Rakshasas. Instead Vibishana, the brother of Ravana was appointed king of Lanka. And there the story of Ramayana ends as far as it concerned Lanka. This is however the portrayal of Ravana in the Ramayana as seen by its author. Other writers, however, see Ravana in a more favourable light especially as a great devotee of Siva. There are

numerous passages in the Tamil classics pointing to Ravana who was not only skilled in arms as became the Lord of Lanka but also richly endowed with holy love. The Rakshasas thereafter disappear from history with only occasional references to them. They are found though in early times as well as to the present day in the folklore of not only India and Lanka but also many countries of South-East Asia through the Ramayana tradition. What one may reasonably suppose is that following the deluge and the submergence of lands, the once powerful kingdom of Ravana disintergrated into smaller kingdoms and principalities in the centuries preceding the Christian era.

The Yakshas though a Dravidian tribe came to be known by a non-Dravidian term. According to K.R.Subramaniam, "The Ramayana and the Mahabharata people Lanka with Yakshas"<sup>3</sup>. Ravana is said to have driven away his half-brother, Kubera, chief of the Yakshas and occupied the country. The latter did in fact succeed in getting back the country for themselves later on. They are thus seen as the successors to the Rakshasas in the island. For they are also equated with the Rakshasas as their kinsmen. The Yakshas are also mentioned in the Brahmi inscriptions in Pandya (200 BC). Early Malabar and Travancore inscriptions mention petty rulers with Yaksha names. In the Pali Chronicles, they are denigrated into Yakkas (demons). The view of them also changes in the Pali Chronicles. Though they are seen as demons and non-humans at the beginning, there are many favourable references to them in the later portions of the Chronicles. According to the Mahavamsa, they occupied portions of Lanka such as Mahiyangana and the north-central region; they were numerous in the south as well. This implies that the Yakshas also occupied all the coast districts outside the limits of Nagadipa and Kalyani. As H.Parker remarks, "there is good reason to suppose that the accounts early writers have given respecting the Yakshas have some foundation in fact"<sup>4</sup>. They belong to the early Dravidian tribes who must have been driven out of the northern districts of the island by the intrusion of the Nagas, a relatively more civilised Dravidian people. According to the Yalpana Vaipaha Malai by Mylvagana Pulavar, the Ithikaasas and Puranas state that Lanka was ruled by the "Yakaas" during the early period of the Kaliyuga; the Yaakas considering it unbecoming to be ruled by foreign kings held the sovereign power. There is reference in the Mahavamsa to a mythical story of three visits to Lanka by the last Buddha. During the first visit mention is made of the miraculous expulsion of the Yakkas from the island to render it habitable for the Gangetic settlers who were to occupy it after his

death. But according to the Mahavamsa, the Yakkas were there when the mythical Vijaya arrives in the island, for the first person he meets after his landing is the Yakkini princess, Kuveni. She is seen with a spinning wheel. This shows that the Yakshas had reached a certain level of development by this time. They were also organised into kingdoms. According to the Mahavamsa, it is with her assistance that he, Vijaya, succeeded in overcoming her people and making himself ruler of a considerable part of Lanka. The earlier Chronicle, the Dipavamsa, makes no mention of Kuveni.

As for the Nagas, there are many more references to them in the Indian epics and literature, as well as in the Lankan Chronicles. According to these accounts, they were considered a relatively more civilised people. According to the Mahabharata, Arjuna married a Naga princess called Chitrangadi, daughter of Chitravahan, King of Manipuram. C.Rasanayagam contends that Manipuram was in Jaffna near Keerimalai and concludes that a Naga kingdom existed in Jaffna at the time of the Mahabharata War ( circa 1500 BC). As we have seen earlier, the Nagas had established kingdoms not only in India but also in Lanka, Chavakam ( Java ), etc. In India, they had also intermarried into other royal families to found dynasties in central India as well. For instance, a prince of Naga extraction founded one of the early ruling dynasties in Magadha and powerful Naga kings were ruling around Nagpur. The name Nagpur itself denotes a Naga connection. Again, we would see later such a marriage alliance happening in Lanka's history as well to connect the Nagas to the Lankan royal dynasty of Anuradhapura. Likewise, as remarked by K.R.Subramaniam, "the Velurpalayam plates of the ninth century inform us that Virakurcha, the first Pallava king attained high status by marrying a Naga princess"<sup>5</sup>. It is believed that this Naga princess was from Nagativu or Nagadipa.

The Mahavamsa refers to the Naga kingdoms in the north and west of Lanka when it relates the second and third visits of the Buddha to the island. On his second visit, the Buddha is said to have visited Nagadipa to settle a war between two Naga kings for a gem-set throne. It was during this visit that he is said to have converted some of the Nagas to Buddhism. According to S.Paranavitana, Nagadipa was the ancient name for the Jaffna Peninsula. It was known in Tamil as Nakanadu or Nakativu. In commenting on the Vallipuram gold plate inscription, he concluded that "as the site of the religious foundation is within the Jaffna Peninsula, it follows that Nagadipa

and the Jaffna Peninsula are identical"<sup>6</sup>. Paul.E.Peiris also came to the same conclusion. The Mahavamsa also records a third visit of the Buddha to another Naga kingdom on the west coast at Kalyani ( Kelaniya ) whose Naga king was Mani-Akkhika. Though these accounts are related in connection with the Buddha's visits, nevertheless they show that there existed Naga kingdoms in the north and west of the island as testified by other evidence. Besides some of the Nagas too had embraced Buddhism during this period, long before Buddhism's official coming to the island. The conflict between the two Naga kings is corroborated by the Manimekalai, a Tamil epic composed about the middle of the second century AD long before the Mahavamsa was compiled.. It is very probable that Manipallavam where the event is placed by the Tamil author is identical with the Nagadipa of the Mahavamsa. It is believed that the deluge which engulfed Kavadapuram and forty-nine Tamil lands in South India and the western Naga kingdom during the reign of Kelani Tissa (circa 250 BC), also took away a large slice of the Naga kingdom in northern Lanka. What was left was a portion of Nagadipa including the present day Jaffna Peninsula and adjoining islands under a Naga king. This kingdom according to C.Rasanayagam "was not confined to the Jaffna Peninsula alone but extended also over the greater part of Vanni including the Punakari and Mannar districts"<sup>7</sup>. Again as observed by H. Parker, during the reign of the first king of Ceylon there is found a town to the north of Anuradhapura which may have been the boundary of the Dravidian territory ie of Nagadipa, specially referred to as the seat of the "Brahmanical Upatissa". In his words, " thus it may possibly have been a town or settlement of early Dravidian colonists".

As we have seen, the other main stream of Dravidian people who had occupied the island from pre-historic times were naturally the Tamils. S.Paranavitana explicitly stated that the megalithic monuments and urn burials belong to the Dravidian speaking people. In his words, "the few megalithic monuments and urn burials discovered in Ceylon are obviously an overflow from South India. The archaeological evidence is supported by literary sources"<sup>8</sup>. As stated earlier, the rituals and ceremonies connected with these urn burials are attested to in the earliest Tamil literature of the Sangam period. A further fact relating to the presence of a Tamil population from the distant past is the observation by Paul.E.Peiris regarding the five isvarams in or near the seaport towns of the island. Given the fact that the beginnings of these temples date from a hoary past, this is further proof of Tamil

settlements from the earliest times. As these temples were intended to cater to the religious wants of a wealthy mercantile population, it shows that some of the earliest settlements were trading settlements and that the Tamils came as peaceful immigrants and traders. It also shows widespread Tamil settlements on the western, northern and eastern coasts of the island. A further fact to be gleaned from this, is that Hinduism and in particular Saivism was introduced to the island from those early days by the Tamils. As we have seen the king of Lanka, Ravana, was a great devotee of the Lord of Koneswaram in Tirukonamalai (Trincomalee). His devotion to God Siva is immortalised in the Hymns of the Hindu Saivite saints. Tradition has it that Mayan, the father-in-law of Ravana, built the temple of Tiruketeeswaram near Mannar. Prince Rama, the builder of the temple at Rameswaram, worshipped at the temple of Muneswaram in Chilaw. The temple of Naguleswaram near Keerimalai and Kankesanthurai was closely associated with the Nagas who though serpent-worshippers also worshipped the Lingam. As observed by K.R.Subramaniam, "Sthalapuranas are not wanting in Tamilakam which mention Naga chiefs as worshipping at some of the Saiva shrines. In fact, the Naga mark, (Nagalatha), was the Lingam. So the Nagas carried the serpent as well as the Linga as their emblem"<sup>10</sup>.

Tamil tradition has it that a queen by the name of Alli Arasani ruled in the region of the north-western coast. She is said to have had an amour with Arjuna, the hero of the Mahabharata, when he visited Lanka on a pilgrimage after the War. There is unmistakable evidence that this region was peopled by Tamils from very early times. They were engaged in trade and fisheries, particularly the pearl fisheries along the north-western coast. This is also the region, as seen earlier, where the burial urns were excavated and where the megalithic people introduced paddy cultivation by means of irrigation. The remains of ruined tanks and ancient temples are proof that it was a prosperous region in early times. It is also noteworthy that many of the ancient temples to God Siva were in close proximity to the ancient tank settlements. It denotes that these areas were colonised at a very early date by a people who understood rice cultivation, such as the Tamils from South India. Furthermore, the place names are all Tamil names. These are a good indication of the linguistic pre-history of the region. It is seen that the people here in those times cultivated the river basins such as the Pali Aru (பாலி = milky), the Per Aru (பேர் = big), Aruvi Aru (அருவி = fast), Uppu Aru (உப்பு = salty), Kala Aru (கால = seasonal), Deduru Oya (தெட்டும் = bringing

destruction) and Nanneri Oya (நன்னெறி = good way). The famous Pandawewa (பண்ணை வாவி = old tank) was here as was the Pomparippu (பொன்பரிப்பு = golden plains) with its stretch of paddy fields and the Kandukali Malaikadu (கங்கூ காலி = cattle; மலைக்காடு = hilly-forest), the forest where cattle roam. The fact that all these place names are Tamil is indicative of the language spoken by the people who had been living here and proof of the early Tamil settlements in the region. A further region occupied by the Tamils from a remote period was the south-east part of the island as testified by the hallowed shrine of Kathirkamam (Kataragama).

In so far as the Yakshas and Nagas are concerned, there are legendary, historical and archaeological evidence relating to the pre-historic period to suggest that these peoples had attained a certain level of culture. The palaeographic evidence of pictographic writing on coins, rocks and potsherds in Lanka show that the Yakshas and Nagas being of Dravidian origin from the Indian mainland had imbibed the culture of the Indus Valley civilization. This is shown by a pictographic form of writing on a stone slab in Tissawewa and on ancient coins noticed by Father Heras. Further evidence of this culture has been found by the discovery of a number of terracotta figurines in Sigiriya and other places in the island. These bear a close resemblance to the figurines of the Indus Valley civilization. S.Paranavitana in his research on the Brahmi inscriptions discovered too, forty-three pictographic symbols among them. He, like those other scholars, has seen resemblances and links of these symbols with those in the Indus Valley script. These pictographic symbols undoubtedly belong to the very early settlers of Lanka, the Yakshas and Nagas who were culturally close to the other Dravidian peoples. They had the facilities to evolve for themselves a certain level of cultural development. The Brahmi inscriptions of Lanka and South India contain a number of references to the Yakshas and Nagas and their cultures. Besides these pictographic symbols, other ancient symbols have also been found by archaeologists in different parts of the island. Pictographic coins and puranas were discovered in Mullaitivu in 1885 as observed by H.Parker. Father Heras examining the script on these symbols says, "the fact that the system of writing was not yet developed like the Brahmi script proves that the coins are prior to the Christian era"<sup>11</sup>. Again, a large number of terra-cotta lingams were found in Illukwewa near Sigiriya and also in numerous places in the island. The Naga gals or stones depicting the cobra have been found near ancient tanks, streams and wells. They represent the sacred guardianship of

water. As observed by Rev.D.J.Kanagaratnam, "the Nagas like the Tamils were also agriculturists and shared a common mystic culture of fertility and fecundity cults"<sup>12</sup>.

The Yakshas and Nagas are not only ethnologically linked to the Tamils but also provided the basic stock for the emergence of the Sinhala people. As S.Paranavitana observed, "the vast majority of the people who today speak Sinhala or Tamil must ultimately be descended from those authochthonous people"<sup>13</sup>. The Tamils however had a separate identity by this time though they did absorb the Yakshas and Nagas. We shall go into this in detail when we deal with ethnicity in a future chapter. Here it may suffice to observe that the Yakshas and Nagas left their cultural influences and marks on both the Tamils and the Sinhalas. Hindu and Buddhist iconography with Yaksha and Naga motifs are many. The cults of Siva-lingam and Nagathambiran and the fertility cults taken over by certain Hindu deities such as Murugan, Pillaiyar and Kali bring out vividly the Naga-Hindu interaction. That the cult entered Hinduism is also seen from the Naga panchami, Naga chaturthi and Naga santi ceremonies connected with the Naga and the obtaining of children still being observed as seen at the Nagapooshani Amman Temple in Nainativu. As for Yaksha influence, two Yakshas with clubs guard every Siva sanctum even today. As remarked by K.R.Subramaniam, "Siva is the lord of the Yakshas"<sup>14</sup>. Some of the deities are survivals of the very early forms of religion. For instance, Valliyakkan ( Val-Iyakkan=mighty Yaksha ) is a survival of the Yaksha cult. Muni and Matan also belong to this category. The large number of Buddha statues with the protective hood of the cobra, the Naga guardstones near dagabas and shrines and the Buddha statues found along with the Naga and Lingam emblems on the banks of ancient tanks tell a story of Naga-Buddhist interaction and cultural fusion from very early times. Again as observed by Rev.D.J. Kanagaratnam, "there are a large number of Hindu-Tamil and Buddhist-Sinhala ceremonies and customs where one could discern the influence of the Yaksha and Naga fertility and fecundity cults"<sup>15</sup>. The marriage, puberty, funeral, sowing and harvesting ceremonies, the ceremonial and cultic use of leaves, plants and fruits etc and the ceremonial use of the Nirakudam or Punkala all show the influence of the Yaksha and Naga cultures. There are also words in the Tamil and Sinhala languages which have been borrowed from the Yakshas and Nagas. Place names, names of fruits, plants and herbs and terms and practices connected for instance with demonology show further traces of such influence.



## LEGEND OF VIJAYA AND MYTH OF INDO-ARYAN ANCESTRY

As we have seen earlier, as far as India is concerned, there never was an invasion of the country by a pure Aryan race or an Aryan civilization brought by it. The nomadic tribes, who came out of the Asian steppes entered India in a series of irruptions. As observed by Romila Thapar, they were "a group of people who spoke related languages". They introduced the Sanskrit language and some culture elements. The German Indologist Max Mueller, who initially propounded the theory of a pure Aryan race by equating language with race soon found in the face of facts that he had to give up his theory. So much so that he recanted hurriedly by saying, "I have declared again and again that if I say Aryans, I mean neither blood nor bones, nor hair nor skull, I mean simply those who speak an Aryan language"<sup>16</sup>. Again as we have seen earlier, the Vedic civilisation and culture that arose in India was so much an Indian product out of an Indian environment and not one introduced by the nomadic tribes. They no doubt brought their language and certain ideas with regard to life and death and the practice of burning the dead etc. These mingled with the Dravidian ideas, beliefs and practices of the time without superseding them, resulting in a fusion and birth of a Vedic culture. As we have also seen, the average face-type of the Indian of today remains that of his Dravidian race ancestors. Such being the case with India, it is clear that there is hardly a basis to speak about an Indo-Aryan colonisation of Lanka. Hardly so with some researchers now, as we have seen, completely debunking the Aryan invasion theory of India. If there were no Aryans and perhaps no Aryan invasion of India, it follows that no Indo-Aryans came to Lanka.

The claim to an Indo-Aryan ancestry by the Sinhala people rests on the legend of Vijaya. The legend deals with the origins and arrival in Lanka of Vijaya with his seven-hundred followers sometime in the fifth century BC from the northern part of India. The basic legend on which there is complete agreement in the Pali Chronicles--the Dipavamsa and the Mahavamsa--as

well as in other accounts, is that a princess was captured and imprisoned in a cave by a lion and gave birth to two children. The son, Sinhabahu, after slaying the lion (his father) founded the city of Sinhapura ( Sihapura ) in the kingdom of Lala. According to the Chronicles , Sinhabahu's son Vijaya and seven-hundred companions were banished for infamous conduct and put on a ship. After a long and tiresome journey, Vijaya and his companions landed in Lanka. Historians have been faced with the problem of determining how much of the legend, as recorded in the Chronicles and other accounts is historic fact and how much is pure fancy or exaggeration beyond ordinary credulity. The first question to be resolved is the human origin of Sinhabahu, whether the amorous daughter of the Venga king gave birth to Sinhabahu and another as a result of mating with a lion. In order to give some credence to the legend, the Mahavamsa states that the son's hands and feet were formed like a lion's and therefore he was named Sinhabahu by the mother. The next question is did Sinhabahu have a twin sister or only a brother. While the Dipavamsa states that there were two brothers, Sinhabahu and Sivali, the Mahavamsa and the Rajavaliya speak of a twin sister. Thus according to the Mahavamsa, "In the kingdom of Lala, in that city ( Sihapura ) did Sihabahu ruler of men hold sway when he made Sihasivali his queen. As time passed on, his consort bore twin sons sixteen times, the eldest was named Vijaya ".<sup>2</sup> The Rajavaliya states that he took to wife his sister and this queen had sixteen pairs of twins. Vijaya is said to be the eldest of the thirty-two sons. The Rajavaliya also states that the seven-hundred companions were born on Vijaya's birthday and grew up to be giants. In the words of Prof. Gananath Obeyesekere thus, "The lion relates to the origin myth of the Sinhalese, the themes of which deal with bestiality, incest and parricide". Notwithstanding this origin myth, the Sinhalas or Sinhalese claim to have descended from Vijaya and his seven-hundred companions. This represents their foundation myth.

It is self-evident that the legend of Vijaya, particularly with respect to the origins of Sinhabahu and Vijaya, is steeped in myth and invention. No intelligent person will accept the account of mating with a lion as a historical truth. As Dr G.C.Mendis states the story of Vijaya seems to have been evolved to explain the origin of the name Sinhala. This supposition is confirmed by such references in the Dipavamsa and the Mahavamsa. In the former is the statement that "the island of Lanka existed as Sinhala after the lion".<sup>3</sup> The Mahavamsa is more explicit when it states that, "king Sinhabahu,

since he had slain the lion was called Sinhala and by reason of the ties between him and them, all those followers of Vijaya were also called Sinhala".<sup>4</sup> Huang Tsang who visited Lanka in the 7th century AD and wrote about it, has also stated that "because the original founder got his name by killing a lion, they ( ie his sons and grandsons ) called the country Sinhala".<sup>5</sup> Thus one can agree with Dr.Mendis that the legend was created to derive the name Sinhala. Again the statement that Vijaya is one of thirty-two brothers who were sixteen pairs of twins can readily be rejected as an invention inspired by the myth. So too are pure fancy, the statements that all seven-hundred companions were born on the same day as Vijaya and were as dissolute as he was to deserve banishment along with him. The Pali Chronicles being the work of Buddhist Theras ( monks ) sought to narrate not only the political history of the island but also the ecclesiastical history of their faith. In the words of B C Law, "The Chronicles of Ceylon were written or composed by Elders whose primary interest naturally lay in the history of Buddhism and Buddhist foundations".<sup>6</sup> As we have seen, in the mythical story during the first of his three visits to the island, the Buddha according to the Mahavamsa had sought the expulsion of the Yakshas to prepare the ground for the arrival of Vijaya. Again, the arrival of Vijaya and his appointed task of securing the island for the Buddha's religion is foretold as narrated in the Mahavamsa. The arrival itself of Vijaya in the island is made to synchronise with the date of the passing away of the Buddha. Later on, Panduvasudeva, Vijaya's successor is made to marry a Sakya princess doubtless due to the desire to connect the royal family of Lanka with the clan of the Buddha himself. As remarked by some historians, these statements are seen as pure fancy or inventions inspired by the myth and are therefore beyond the bounds of historical truth.

S.Pathmanathan dismisses the story of Vijaya as a legend as do several others. In his words, "The traditional accounts of the origins of the Sinhalese as given in the Pali chronicles are legendary and cannot be considered as history".<sup>7</sup> Again as Senake Bandaranayake observes, " most historians are agreed that the story itself is purely legendary, a myth of origin, synthesized from various early Indian legends".<sup>8</sup> However some of these historians tend to accept the basic premise that civilization in Lanka had its origins in the settlement of migrant colonists from northern India. Apart from those from the Mahavamsa School, some others too seek to extract a kernel of historical truth from the legend. Hence as K. M.de Silva says, "Beneath this charming

exercise in myth-making lurks a kernel of historical truth--the colonisation of the island by Indo-Aryan tribes from North India".<sup>9</sup>. There is no archaeological or other evidence however as we shall see later on to lend support to this notion of colonisation of the island by Indo-Aryan tribes from North India. The biggest controversy created by the different versions of the Vijaya story in the Chronicles is over the exact location of the home of Vijaya. While the home of the amorous princess is stated to be Venga , what is now West Bengal, the location of Lala, the name of the country in which she encountered the lion is disputed. There are those who hold that Lala is synonymous with Ladha or Radha which is on the east coast of India in the present districts of Tamlouk and Midnapore (on the banks of the Hoogly River); others though --the west coast theorists-- contend that Lala is synonymous with Lata which is the ancient name for Guzerat ( which is in the north-west of India ). As H.W.Codrington in this connection remarks, "if there is any truth in the account of Vijaya's ancestry, it is difficult to admit the probability of any connection between the petty kings of Bengal ( Venga) and Gujerat ( Lata ) on opposite sides of the Indian Ocean"<sup>10</sup>. Again,Vijaya's journey to Lanka and the places he stopped at during his voyage viz Suppara and Barukachcha have given rise to further controversy as regards their identification and location. Were they on the east coast or west coast of India? As they appear to be on the west coast of India, it seems highly improbable that Vijaya and his followers sailed all the way from the west of India to Lanka. So much so that H.Parker remarks that "a great part of the story of Wijaya's exile from his father's realm and his journey to the island appears to be fictitious"<sup>11</sup>.

Despite all the the evidence to the contrary, there are some scholars who refer to the colonisation of the island by Indo-Aryan tribes from north India. A wrong impression is created that Vijaya landed in Lanka at the head of an expeditionary force and conquered the inhabitants and colonised the country. Both the Mahavamsa and the Dipavamsa make no attempt to glorify Vijaya as a conqueror or white-wash his character. Thus the Mahavamsa states that, "Vijaya was of evil conduct and his followers were even like himself and many intolerable deeds of violence were done by them"<sup>12</sup>. There is unmistakable mention in the Chronicles of the landing in the island of hungry, thirsty and wearied exiles. Had not Kuveni nourished them, they would have starved to death and had not Kuveni taken a fancy to Vijaya, the Yakshas could have exterminated the weary exiles without much difficulty.

Again as mentioned earlier, K.M. de Silva himself states that at the present time there is no archaeological evidence with regard to the early Indo-Aryan settlers; in particular that there are no archaeological finds that could be traced back to either the west or east coasts of Northern India. As for the colonisation of the island, there is no historical evidence of any immigration of people from Lala either from the north-west or north-east of India after Vijaya's coming. The only immigration so-called thereafter was that of Panduvasudeva, Vijaya's successor and his thirty-two companions. Since the figure of thirty- two is seen as an exaggeration, Panduvasudeva's arrival could hardly be termed an immigration wave to support the theory of colonisation. But even the so-called arrival of Panduvasudeva from northern India is seen as an invention, for as we shall see later on, he is indeed regarded as a prince of Pandyan extraction as his name bears out. As Pathmanathan observed no clear evidence of a large scale migration of Indo-Aryans to the island has hitherto emerged. Thus one can agree with B C Law who observes that "the Chroniclers were mad about the idea of giving Vijaya an Indo-Aryan ancestry against all the historical facts"<sup>13</sup>. This represents, however, the colonisation myth of the Sinhala people.

Despite all the weight of evidence against an Indo-Aryan ancestry, there is still a persistence in the belief that not only were the first settlers from the north of India but also those features predominate in the racial make-up of the Sinhala people. Hence we see for instance K.M. de Silva who writes as follows: "Thus Sri Lanka has been from very early times in its recorded history a multi-ethnic society in which a recognisable Dravidian component was present but was not sufficiently powerful to alter the basic Aryan or North Indian character of the population"<sup>14</sup>. The facts however fly in the face of such a bold assertion. Even in the case of India, as we have seen that it has not been possible to establish a basic Aryan character to its population, if by Aryan is meant such features as a white complexion, blond hair, blue or grey eyes etc. Ethnologically speaking, we do not find any of these Aryan features for example except in the Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province. From the Punjab downwards along the Ganges to the East and the Indus to the South-West, the Aryan ethnic type disappears being completely absent in Gujerat and Bengal. And as Kumari Jayawardene observed, " the Bengalis themselves do not claim to be Aryans". It is clear that the absence of Aryan features is due to the overwhelming presence of Dravidian and other non-Aryan types in the Indian population. This also proves the point that the

Dravidians were not all driven out of the north. As G. Slater concludes, "For the most, even the foreign observers have been struck with what may be termed the racial homogeneity of the great majority of the people of India and have drawn the natural inference that Indians are in the main Dravidians by race"<sup>15</sup>.

If such be the case in India, what basis is there to even lay claim that the basic character in the racial make-up of the Sinhala people is Aryan or North Indian. As Dr N.K. Sarkar puts it, "no matter what the racial origin, little remains of the original stock, except a belief in it"<sup>16</sup>. We have seen that the attempts made to give Vijaya and his followers an Indo-Aryan ancestry goes against all the historical facts. Nor has there been any large scale immigration into the island from northern India. Even assuming for a moment that the mythical Vijaya with only seven-hundred followers came from Gujarat or Bengal, surely any north Indian element that they may have brought has completely disappeared by their absorption in the local populace of Yakshas and Nagas and in the Tamil immigrants from South India to the island. If this were not so, we should be able to find at least a sprinkling of Gujarati names such as Patel, Shah, Dalal and Metha or Bengali names such as Gupta, Roy, Sen and Chatterjee among the names of the Sinhalese. We find none. On the contrary, a large number of Sinhalese names are derived from South Indian names of Chola, Nayakkar, Chera and Chalukyan origin. Thus Sinhala names ending in the suffix "wardena" are of Chalukyan origin; Sinhala names ending with the suffixes "tunge", "singhe", "sooriya" and "sekera" are of Chola origin. Those ending with "naike" and "kon" are derived from the 'nayakkars' and "konars" of Madurai, the nayakkars having hailed originally from the Andhra region of South India. To illustrate the point, the following names can be seen to have been derived from the Tamil names given against them.

Sinhala names	Tamil names
Rajasinghe	Rajasingham
Chandrasekera	Chandrasekeram
Rajasooriya	Rajasuriar
Gunaratne	Gunaratnam
Kulatunge	Kulatungam
Wijenaike	Wijenayagam
Alagakoon	Alagakon

As is self-evident, far from having an Indo-Aryan ancestry, the Sinhala people have indeed an Indo-Dravidian ancestry. Though K.M. de Silva is only willing to concede that there is a recognisable Dravidian component in the make-up of the Sinhala people, others have shown that this is considerable. Thus Dr G.C. Mendis states that "there is sufficient evidence that in the early centuries of the Christian era, the Dravidians helped to form the Sinhala race. --- It is difficult to gauge the extent of Tamil blood in the Sinhalese but there is no doubt that it is considerable"<sup>17</sup>. This is not surprising as S.Pathmanathan remarks that "the ancestors of the vast majority of Ceylonese are of Indian origin and most of them seem to have come to the Island from the southern parts of India"<sup>18</sup>. As we have seen, pre-historic archaeological remains show that the neo-lithic and megalithic stages of civilization spread to the island from South India. The major communities of pre-historic Lanka--the Rakshasas, Yakshas and Nagas--being Dravidian entered the island from South India and they had close affinities with the Tamils and other groups of Dravidians. And we have also seen that the Tamils too had occupied the island from very early times. Such being the case, it is S. Paranavitana who went on to say that "the vast majority who today speak Sinhalese and Tamil must ultimately be descended from these authochthonous people"<sup>19</sup>. Again, Dr P.Raghupathy concludes that "Tamil and Sinhala identities stemmed from a common cultural stratum in the distant past"<sup>20</sup>. It may be pointed out that while a Tamil identity already existed by this time, as we have seen, a Sinhala identity is what emerged from this Dravidian ethnic and cultural base.

Anthropologically speaking, man though of one mould, peoples differ one from another. The science of anthropology refers to physical or racial anthropology and cultural anthropology. As far as physical or racial anthropology is concerned, it is now generally admitted that there is no one pure race of people and the task of classifying people according to a standard set of physical characteristics is a daunting task. As Claude Levi-Strauss, in an essay on "Race and Culture" observes, " Anthropologists have simply ceased to use the concept (of race) at all". Nor is race today made the basis for action as all forms of racism are rejected by the international community. Discrimination based on race is outlawed in civilised communities. Cultural anthropology studies human societies with reference to their living

conditions, patterns of live, customs and traditions etc. Such cultural diversity is accepted today in the modern world as enriching and fulfilling. As far as Lanka is concerned, it can be seen that it is the cultural outlook and diversity that predominates Lankan society from the early period and consequently has differentiated the Sinhalese from the Tamils. Studies by Hooton, an anthropologist, has led him to observe that the Tamils and the Sinhalese are each a morphological type of the composite Indo-Dravidian race, "a blend of a number of racial strains on a basic Mediterranean race"<sup>21</sup>. Thus the racial characteristics in the Tamil and Sinhala peoples are generally similar so much so that E.R.Leach remarks that "the Tamils and the Sinhalese are racially alike but sharply distinguished in religion, language and customs of life"<sup>22</sup>. One may therefore conclude that differences in religion, language and ways of life have grown from a common stratum to differentiate the Sinhalese from the Tamils and to establish their separate identities. It is the historically acquired cultural traits that have gone to distinguish and define the Sinhala ethnic group from the Tamils of today. As for the racial characteristics of the people of Lanka, what has come down, as seen, is the Dravidian ethnic type among its population. This is not surprising. For as has been pointed out by Sesha Iyengar, "among the modern Indians, as amongst the modern Greeks and Italians, the ancient pre-Aryan type of the land has survived, while that of the Aryan conqueror died out long ago"<sup>23</sup>. If this be the case of India, how much more must be the case of Lanka. With no historical evidence to-date of any Aryan or north Indian settlement and colonisation at any time in its history, the predominant racial element in the population of the island from the beginning has been and remains the Dravidian ethnic type.



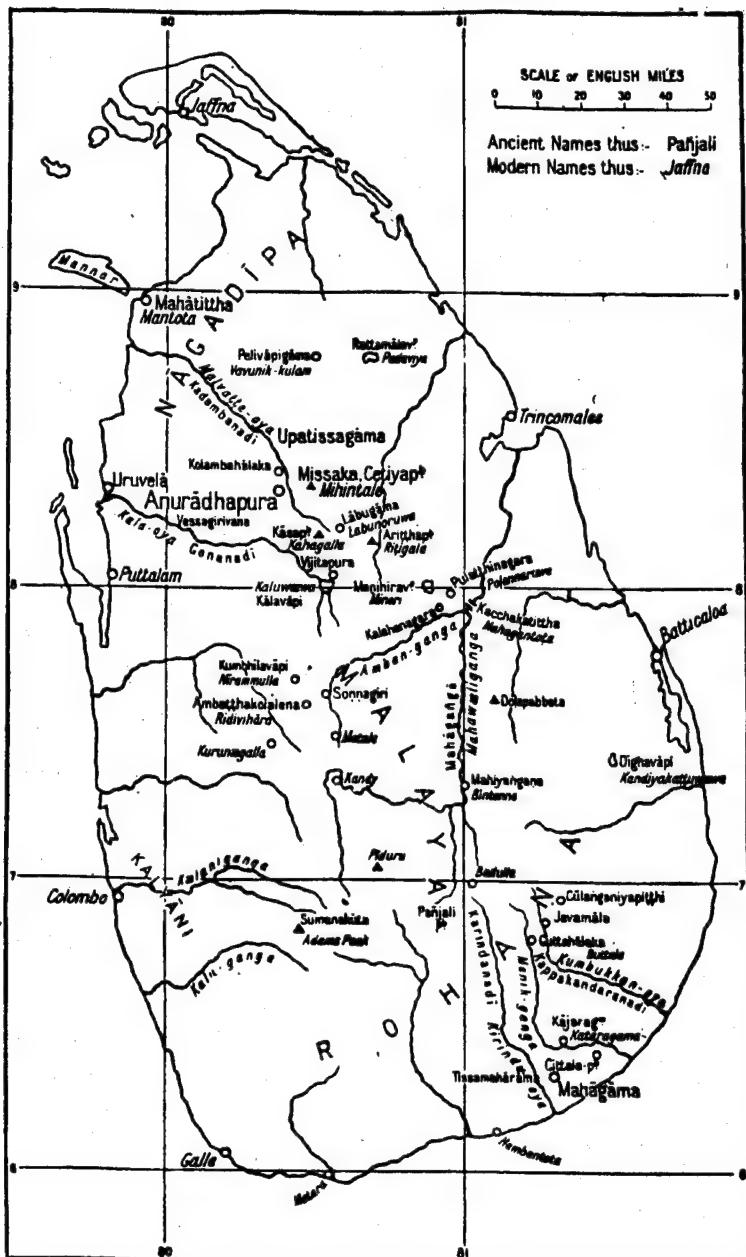
## CHAPTER VIII

### FIRST DYNASTY OF KINGS OF ANURADHAPURA

If anything is to be made of the legend of Vijaya, shorn of its myths and inventions, it is this. It is more than probable that a Vijaya and his followers came to the island from the south of India. This theory is put forward by C. Rasanayagam where in his book ( Ancient Jaffna ), he argues that the city of Sinhapura ( Sihapura ) which Sinhabahu is supposed to have built is found to be in Kalinga country. This is not surprising for on the authority of the Mahavamsa itself, the grandmother of Vijaya was the daughter of a Venga prince by a Kalinga princess. Both Venga and Kalinga were Dravidian kingdoms. There are also other references to the Kalinga kingdom by the Chroniclers. General Cunningham places Venga in, "the Godavari district of the Andhra State and locates Sinhapura of the legend with Simhapura, a modern town in the Ganjam district of Orissa". Huan Tsang, a Chinese writer, also states that Venga was in southern India and his statement accords with this location. In both the Tamil epic poems, the Silappadikaram and the Manimekalai, written well before the Mahavamsa, Sinhapuram is mentioned as a town in the Kalinga country. Kalinga was one of the earliest kingdoms established in the Deccan by Dravidian tribes long before the Aryan push into India. It is mentioned in the Ramayana and Mahabharata as one of the flourishing kingdoms. Anga, Venga and Kalinga are referred to by the Aryans as foreign ( mlechha ) kingdoms. Again the Kalingas were a people who were first among Indian races to cross the seas, not only for commercial enterprise but also for the sake of conquest and colonisation. They founded colonies in far off Java and Malaya. It is they, it is said, who established the town of Singapura--now called Singapore. Indians from whatever country they may come are still known among the Malays as "Klings" or "Killangs"--a corruption of the term Kalinga.

As opposed to the theory of a Kalinga home for Vijaya, a further likely hypothesis is that Vijaya could have come to the island from any place along the Cholamandalam ( Coromandel ) Coast in South India. Trade was an important motivating factor during the earliest times in South India. From the beginning, the possibility is that traders reached the island while sailing down

## MAP OF ANCIENT LANKA



the Indian coast and that the natural products of Lanka, in particular gems, pearls and spices, provided the incentive for some to found settlements. Hence, B.C.Law expresses surprise that "the authors of the Chronicles were silent altogether on the previous trade connection of the island with the mainland"<sup>2</sup>. He goes on to say that they seemed "unaware of the tradition narrating how a leader of sea-going merchants figured ultimately as the first monarch of Ceylon and the first ruling dynasty"<sup>3</sup>. Dr.S. Pathmanathan too mentions that as South India and Lanka formed one trading unit during this time, the latter was brought within the sphere of South Indian political influence. According to him, "the earliest Tamil conquests of the island seem to have been undertaken by merchant princes"<sup>4</sup>. That this might have been the case, can be seen from later Lankan history when two Tamil horse traders seized the throne of Lanka and ruled the kingdom for a not inconsiderable period. Hence the historical Vijaya is more likely to have been a South Indian merchant prince or leader setting out from any place along the Coromandel Coast to establish his kingdom in the island. Such a proposition has been put forward by S.J. Gunasegaram who observes that "Vijaya himself was a Hindu and an adventurer probably from the Pandyan-Andhra border known as Tiruvengadam, once a Veddah dependency of the Pandyan king"<sup>5</sup>. This would give the historical Vijaya a Pandyan abode. It also makes sense of his later actions, particularly his action in seeking a princess from Pandya to be his wife. Again Vijaya is said to have requested the help of artisans and artificers from Pandya to build his capital city.

There is no certainty as to where Vijaya and his followers first landed in the island. Some say that it was in the north; others that it was in the east or south-east and yet others in the west or north-west. There is now a majority view among scholars that Vijaya landed on the west coast near present day Puttalam. C.Rasanayagam however is of the view that Vijaya first landed in the north and after a sojourn there went southwards along the western coast. There is a local tradition in the Jaffna Peninsula even now and which has been embodied in the Yalpana Vaipava Malai that Vijaya landed on the northern coast and took up residence at Kadiramalai ( Kanterodai ), the then capital of a Naga kingdom. As Vijaya was a Hindu, Tamil tradition has it that he built some temples and renovated others. The temple that he built in the north is called Tirutambeleswaram near present day Keerimalai, as there are lands in the vicinity still going under the name of "Tirutampalai". It is more than likely that he spoke or knew Tamil ( for there was no language called

Sinhala at that time ). After a brief sojourn in the north, he went west according to C.Rasanayagam where with the help of Kuveni, a Yakkini princess, he carved out a kingdom for himself. It may be pointed out that this kingdom lay in the northwest between the Naga kingdoms in the north (Nagadipa ) and the west ( Kalyani ) and in land occupied by the Yakshas. There is no mention in the Dipavamsa, the earlier of the two Chronicles, of the encounter with Kuveni. It mentions though that Tambapanni was the first town in Lankadipa and Vijaya resided there and founded his kingdom. As we have seen Tambapanni was already an established place by that time. Vijaya is said however to have built a capital city there called Tamananuwara.

What may be inferred from all this is that Vijaya came across from the South Indian mainland ( Coromandel Coast ), landing in the north and after a sojourn there went along the coast to the west of the island and founded his kingdom in Tambapanni with or without Kuveni's help. If he was a merchant prince or trader as surmised, his aim must have been to gain control of the trade from the Yakshas as well. Once having established his kingdom, it would have been only natural for the historical Vijaya to look for a royal princess to be his wife. Being a Hindu and perhaps conversant in Tamil, he would naturally have looked to the Pandyan country which was just across on the mainland to his kingdom and from which region he probably came. Hence the mission despatched to the Pandyan king for the hand of the Pandyan princess and just as well to win the support and protection of the Pandyan king. The Pandyan king for his part may have been eager to establish a thriving trade in place of the furtive and fear-laden trade with the Yakshas which had been carried on earlier. And if as we have surmised that Vijaya was a merchant prince or trader from South India and one who was a Hindu and conversant in Tamil, the King would have had few reservations in giving his consent to Vijaya's request. The rest is best related by quoting the Mahavamsa on the Pandyan king's actions. "When he had thus obtained many maidens and had given compensations to their families, he sent his daughter bedecked with all her ornaments and all that was needful for the journey and all the maidens he had fitted out according to their rank, elephants withal and horses and wagons worthy of a king and craftsmen and a thousand families of the eighteen guilds entrusted with a letter to the conqueror Vijaya". This multitude of men, it is said, disembarked at Mahatittha ( Mahathirtam or Mantai ). As we have seen Mantai was the commercial capital of Nagadipa, the Naga kingdom ruled by Naga kings

from Kadirimalai ( Kanterodai ), though the Mahavamsa is silent on this score. As observed by B.J.Perera, "Although Mahatittha ( Matoddam ) is first mentioned in connection with the landing of Vijaya's second wife, there is no doubt that it was used as a port by the Tamils long before the Aryan settlement in Ceylon".

There is no independent corroboration, however, from South Indian sources of the Mahavamsa account. Hence S.J.Gunasegeram believes that it is inconceivable that the Pandyan king known in ancient Tamil literature as "Tennavan", Lord of the South, would have sent his own daughter to marry an adventurer. Under the circumstances, he says, that one would not be far wrong in inferring that the ladies who came over to marry, though belonging to the Pandyan country, were in such circumstances that they consented to leave their homes and parents for the greener pastures of Lanka. The probability is then that Vijaya was a merchant prince to be deserving of a princess. The Vijayan era, however, was one of cordiality between Pandya and Lanka as one would have expected. All through his long reign of thirty-eight years, Vijaya sent to the Pandyan king an annual present of "a shell pearl worth twice a hundred thousand "(pieces of money), according to the Mahavamsa . This is equivalent to a tribute to the Pandyan king whose protection he acknowledged. Bishop R.Caldwell commenting on this says that Vijaya bestowed on his Pandya father-in-law two lakhs worth of chanks and pearls. "Does this mean that at that time Ceylon was tributary to the Pandyas"? Again, the Pandyan King sent not only his daughter and 700 maidens with their retinue and staff but also a thousand families from the eighteen guilds. These facts swell the numbers of Tamil colonists to at least twenty times more than the so-called original settlers. Besides the communication that Vijaya maintained with Pandya could not have failed to lead to a continual influx of Tamils from Pandya during his and his successors reigns. Thus intimate intercourse and consanguinity were established from the remotest period. As W.Geiger remarked, " a strong infusion of Dravidian blood must have taken place in the first period of colonization from the nearest civilised country".

That the historical Vijaya contracted a marriage from the Pandyan country is evident from the fact that his successors came from Pandya. As Vijaya had no issue by his Pandyan wife, he was succeeded by Panduvasa or Panduvasudeva, his wife's nephew. The author of the Mahavamsa once again

seeks to give Panduvasudeva a north Indian ancestry. He also contrives to find for him a wife belonging to the Buddha's clan by the name of Kaccana or Bhaddakaccana. This whole episode smacks of another invention on the part of the authors of the Chronicles. It has been dismissed by discerning historians as fictitious. As B.C. Law explains, "the change of the Dipavamsa name Panduvasa into Panduvasudeva must have been purposely done in the later chronicle--the Mahavamsa--the author of which seems to have been somehow acquainted with the name of Paundravasudeva, a king of Vanga and Kalinga mentioned in the Mahabharata in connection with his military campaign of Bhima". As for his marriage with Kaccana, B.C. Law says, "Another happy coincidence is devised for a critical juncture when a suitable princess is needed to be queen of Panduvasa. The princess supplied is a Sakya maiden called Kaccana or Bhaddakaccana who arrived on the island precisely with a retinue of thirty-two maidens"<sup>10</sup>. It certainly cannot be accepted as a historical fact that a bride named Bhaddakaccana who was set adrift in a boat down the Ganges arrived in Lanka with a number of maidens equal to those male companions who accompanied Panduvasudeva and that she and the maidens married Panduvasudeva and his companions. It is part of the legend inserted to connect the Buddha's family with the mythical Vijaya's successor. More convincingly though, as mentioned earlier, is the fact that Panduvasa or Panduvamsadeva was a prince of Pandyan extraction as the appellation "Pandu" bears out. As Bishop R. Caldwell puts it, "we can scarcely err in concluding that he was a prince of Pandyan extraction"<sup>11</sup>. As is known, the Pandyan kings traced their origin to the Pandus or Pandavas, the heroes of the Mahabharata. No one has doubted the existence of the Pandyan kingdom from the time of the Mahabharata or even earlier. Further the history of the Tamil Sangams shows that the Pandyan kingdom existed from very ancient times. It is more than likely then that Panduvasa was Vijaya's Pandyan wife's sister's son rather than Vijaya's brother's son. The name Panduvasa which according to the matrilineal custom gives precedence to the mother's name or tribe in an inter-tribal marriage, surely is evidence that this king had a Pandyan mother. Similarly a later king was named Pandukabhaya showing that he had too a Pandyan mother. According to Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the court of Chandragupta, the Pandyas were originally a people who maintained the tradition of a matriarchal form of society. Hence as S.J. Gunasegeram says, "Panduvasa and Abhaya who followed (Vijaya), were full blooded Tamils from the Pandyan country. Abhaya's successor was Pandukabhaya, a combination of the names of Panduvasa and

Abhaya. Pandukabhaya gives his son a Tamil Saiva name-Mutusiva"<sup>12</sup>. It is really, as in the Tamil, Mutha-sivan (முத்த சிவன்).

As regards the chronology of the first kings of Anuradhapura, the University History of Ceylon states that the dates given up to Sena I (833-853 AD) are only approximate and not all the rulers listed had effective control of the whole island. As regards the first five kings from Vijaya to Mutusiva are concerned, it gives no dates for their periods of rule until the next ruler King Devanampiya Tissa who ruled between 250-210 BC.

W. Geiger presents the following chronology of the kings of Lanka and Magadha starting with the Buddha era of 483 BC.

Lanka		Magadha	
1) Vijaya	483-445 BC	1) Ajatasattu	491-459 BC
Interregnum	445-444	2) Udayabhadda	459-443
2) Panduvasa	444-414	3) Anuruddha & Munda	443-435
3) Abhaya	414-394	4) Nagadasaka	435-411
Interregnum	394-377	5) Susunaga	411-393
4) Pandukabhaya	377-307	6) Kalasoka	393-365
		7) Ten sons of Kalasoka	365-343
		8) Nine Nanda brothers	343-321
5) Mutusiva	307-247	9) Candagutta	321-297
6) Devanampiya Tissa	247-207	10) Bindusara	297-269
		11) Dhammasoka	269-232

According to K.M.de Silva, "While the Mahavamsa treats all kings of Sri Lanka since the mythical Vijaya as rulers of the whole island, the inscriptive evidence points to a quite different situation, with the Anuradhapura kingdom--tradition attributes its foundation to Pandukabhaya, the third king of the Vijayan dynasty--merely the strongest, if that, among the several in the northern plain and in the Malaya and Rohana regions as well as in other parts of the country"--"This structure had not changed substantially during the rule of Devanampiya Tissa"<sup>13</sup>. It is clear from this that Lanka from

the beginning was never a unified whole during this ancient period. Special mention needs to be made of Kings Pandukabhaya and Mutusiva as they had long reigns of seventy and forty years respectively. Pandukabhaya (377-307 BC) was the third king after Vijaya and had to fight his uncles before he seized the throne. As mentioned earlier, he had a Pandyan mother. When he was a young man, his mother sent him to a rich and learned Brahman who saw that his pupil was destined to become king. He taught him every accomplishment worthy of a king and helped him with money and soldiers to gain the throne. A great battle took place in which he received the help of the Yakshas. After a war which lasted over seventeen years, he was able to become king. About 437 BC he transferred the capital to Anuradhapura (the Anurogrammum of Ptolemy, the Greek geographer) which was then not more than a village. In building Anuradhapura into a fine and prosperous city, "he faithfully followed the Indian system of town planning and town administration"<sup>14</sup>. The city was provided with four gates each of which opened into a suburb. Four tanks were caused to be made. Friendly relations were established with the Yakshas who had helped him in the battles to become king. The king appointed his uncle Abhaya as the Nagaraguttika--Mayor of the City. He built a residence for the Brahman Jotiya, the chief engineer and quarters for the Brahmins. As a matter of fact, he provided residences for five-hundred persons of different religious faiths. The religious conditions which prevailed in the island before the reign of Devanampiya Tissa were precisely the same as those presupposed before Asoka in India. There were the hermits, Brahmins, wandering ascetics, Ajivikas, Jaina and other recluses. The ascetic god Siva had a good deal of hold over the religious beliefs of the people as manifest from the name of the next king Mutusiva who followed Pandukabhaya. The god Uppalavanna or Visnu was also worshipped. The island had also the age old shrines of the Yakshas and Nagas. As can be inferred a spirit of religious tolerance prevailed, coming down from the king himself.

A further significant development with the first dynasty of kings of Anuradhapura, in addition to their Pandyan origins, was its integration with the Naga dynasty during the reign of Mutusiva. As observed earlier, Vijaya's sojourn at Kadiramalai in Nagadipa as the king's guest accounted for peaceful relations between those kings and Vijaya and his early successors. Although the capital was moved to Anuradhapura during the reign of Pandukabhaya as we have seen, it was still in territory earlier occupied by the Yakshas. The

Naga kings continued to rule in Nagadipa as well as Kalyani ( Kelaniya) though the Mahavamsa is silent about these details. According to C.Rasanayagam, King Mutusiva married a Naga princess from Nagadipa and among his sons were Tissa and Mahanaga. Tissa as we know came to be called Devanampiya ( Beloved of the gods ) Tissa by the author of the Mahavamsa. With the ascension to the throne of his brother Mahanaga after him, we observe a number of kings with Naga names on the throne. As we shall see later on, fourteen kings bore Tamil names and nineteen kings bore Naga names. The numerous kings bearing the suffix "naga" clearly shows the result of integration and complete fusion of the Pandyan dynasty from Mathurai with the local Naga dynasty from Kadiramalai. This clearly shows that the first dynasty of kings on the Anuradhapura throne was Pandyan and Naga and thus Dravidian in every sense. Again, according to Rasanyagam, the standard displaying a lion appears to be one used by the Naga kings of Nagadipa. One could therefore speculate that with the marriage of King Mutusiva to a Naga princess, the emblem of the Nagas became the emblem of the kings of Lanka. This appears to be a more plausible account of how the lion became in due course an emblem of the ruling house of Anuradhapura instead of deducing it from the Vijayan myth. It is also worthy of note, as seen from the chronological table given earlier, a branch of the Nagas in India had also married into the dynasty of Magadha which produced Dhamma Asoka. In the line of Magadha kings, we find names such as Nagadasaka and Sisunaga which is evidence of Naga blood.

Much is often said about the dry zone civilization of Lanka in ancient times based on tank irrigation. It is now necessary to show that the cultivation of rice and the system of irrigation which accompanied it was introduced by the early Dravidian peoples who occupied the island from pre-historic times. And this was further developed by the first dynasty of kings who sat upon the Anuradhapura throne. Attempts are made in some quarters to put forward the theory that the science of irrigation was unknown to the inhabitants of Lanka in pre-historic times and that the science itself was an Aryan product and first brought to Lanka by the Indo-Aryan tribes from north India. We have already shown that there was no Indo-Aryan colonisation and settlement of the island at any time in Lanka's history. Equally important it is now necessary to show that the Indo-Aryans were unfamiliar with the cultivation of rice and the science of irrigation. As we have seen, the tribes that entered India through the north-west were at most nomadic/pastoral people. They came from the

Asian steppes outside any river basin civilisations. There is no evidence of such irrigation systems built by them in India after their coming. On the other hand, it was the Dravidians who not only developed the cultivation of rice and the science of irrigation but also brought these to Lanka. The names of marutham ( மருதம் ), the land where paddy and other grains are cultivated with the aid of irrigation and of paddy ( நெல் ), are Dravidian terms. The artificial irrigation of the soil by constructing large reservoirs and canals on an extensive scale was encouraged by the early Tamils as mentioned in the Purananuru (a Tamil literary work).

நிலங்களி மருங் கி ஸ்ராநிலைபெநுகத்  
தட்டோரம் மவிவட்ட ஜோரே.

(Verily, he who has turned the bent (low) land into a reservoir to arrest the flow of the running water is one who has established a name in this world). "This system, in those days, says Meadows Taylor, " existed probably in no other country except Babylon".

As Dr S.Goonatilleke observes, "Settled agriculture, especially those associated with tank irrigation is often considered to be an introduction of Sinhala culture that was brought by the waves of speakers of a North Indian dialect. However, there is considerable evidence, both direct and indirect that settled irrigated agriculture arose before and independent of, the coming of the North Indian language speakers"<sup>15</sup>. It is known that large tanks or reservoirs had been built in Lanka long before the arrival of the historical Vijaya. Thus R.L Brohier writes as follows about the Giant's Tank. "Tradition had handed down a belief that Giant's Tank is the most ancient irrigation reservoir extant in Ceylon, so ancient that it is not mentioned in any chronicles as having been built by any kings who reigned in Ceylon after Vijaya"<sup>16</sup>. The existence of the extensive ruins at Mantai and of the celebrated Giant's Tank ( Tamil=Maha-vavi ) close to it are indubitable signs of an immense population well advanced in agriculture. The river here was the Kadamba nadi ( Malwattu Oya) as referred to by its Tamil name in the Mahavamsa. The Giant's Tank must, according to C.Rasanayagam, have been the work of the remotest times, constructed probably by the ancient Nagas who were the people then living in that part of Lanka.

But of even greater antiquity was the region in the north-western part of the island, where the remains of ruined tanks and place names are proof that it was once a prosperous region. As observed earlier, the people here in those

times cultivated the river basins such as the Pali Aru, Per Aru, Aruvi Aru, Uppu Aru, Kala Aru etc. The celebrated Pandai-vavi ( Old Tank ) was here as was the Pomparippu, the golden plains with its stretch of paddy fields. The fact that all these place names were Tamil are surely indicative that it was the Tamils who lived here and introduced the cultivation of rice and the science of irrigation. This is not surprising as the Tamils on the South Indian mainland had made great advances in agriculture and rice cultivation. It is said that a branch of the Vellalas, the old farming caste of Tamilakam received the grain from the Goddess Parvati herself. It was the Tamil name of the grain "arisi" ( rice ) that was adopted into the Greek language as "oryza" and through the Latin "oryza" has passed into modern European languages; French=riz and English=rice.

It is stated in the Mahavamsa, that when first entertained, Vijaya was served by Kuveni with rice gathered from the wrecks of ships. This shows that rice cultivation was not practised by the Yakshas, though the Nagas and the Tamils were engaged in it in the island. It is after the advent of Vijaya that vast strides were made in the cultivation of rice after its introduction in his kingdom. It is with Vijaya's marriage to the Pandyan princess that we see the arrival of Tamil artisans and agriculturists to Vijaya's kingdom. As mentioned earlier, there arrived with the Pandyan princess a thousand families from the eighteen guilds. According to P.Arunachalam during the period of Vijaya's successors, "Tamil colonies of agriculturists and artificers were imported in large numbers and rice and other cultivation introduced. Irrigation works were constructed"<sup>17</sup>. When Pandukabhaya moved the capital to Anuradhapura and built a new capital there, he had four tanks built. As observed by Bishop R.Caldwell, "it is worthy of notice that it was by those two princes with Pandya names ( Panduvasa and Pandukabhaya ) that the three great reservoirs for which Ceylon is famous are said to have been made. May it hence be concluded that the idea of making reservoirs for irrigation was borrowed by the early Sinhalese from the people of Tinnevelly or Madura Coast?"<sup>18</sup>. When we look at the earliest tanks built in the Anuradhapura District, it is not surprising to note that they had only Tamil names such as Attikulam, Mankulam, Kaddupuliyankulam, Periyakulam, Wannankulam, Chinnachippikulam, Kuttikulam, Nawalkulam, Puvarasankulam, Pandyankulam etc. Though "kulam" has become "kulama" (Sinhalese), the prefixes are all Tamil words. It is evident from these names as to who constructed these early tanks and who cultivated the lands at that

time. A further proof of this is the names of the guardian deities of these tanks. The guardian deities of the famous Kalawewa tank were Kadavara Deiviyo and Ilandari Deiviyo. Kalawewa itself is the Tamil Kalavavi ( காலவாவி ), the tank that gets its water during the season (rainy season). Kadavara is the Tamil deity Kaddu Vairavar ( கட்டு வைரவர் ). Ilandari is a Tamil word meaning young person. Other similar guardian deities are Aiyanar (ஐயனார் ), Kali ( காளி ) etc. A further revealing fact is that the irrigation terms used are Tamil or Tamil derivatives as seen below. The Tamil words used are for instance : 1) anai ( அணை ) = support; 2 kaddu ( கட்டு ) = construction; 3) anaikaddu ( அணைகட்டு = supporting embankment; 4) kadavai ( கடவை ) = ford or place where one crosses; 5) munai ( முனை ) = point, the end; 6) thekkam ( தேக்கம் ) = reservoir; 7 kulam ( குளம் ) = tank, pond etc. The Sinhalese words derived from Tamil for instance are 1) ela = ali ( ஆலி ) = ridge or mound of earth; 2) yodi-ela = uyantha ali ( உயர்ந்த ஆலி ) = a canal of higher elevation; 3) kalingula = kalinkul ( கலிங்குல் ) = contrivance built into a spill to raise spill level of tank; 4) potawa = paravai (பரவை ) = flat expanse of water; 5) wakkada = vaikkal ( வாய்க்கால் ) = water course; 6) kulama = kulam ( குளம் ) = tank ;7) wewa = vavi ( வாவி ) = tank etc. It is clear that it was the knowledge and skills of the Tamil settlers who were responsible for the construction of the early irrigation works, tanks and canals. The Yakshas may have provided the unskilled labour. There is no evidence whatsoever to state that this engineering knowledge and skills came from north India. As Dr S.Goonatilleke concludes, "we could reasonably speculate that most such tanks were built on technology associated with the megalithic South Indian culture"<sup>19</sup>. The dry zone hydraulic civilization of Lanka is Dravidian-based from the beginning and it was taken to higher levels in Lanka later on. There is no evidence of any Aryan or north Indian input at any stage in its development.



## CHAPTER IX

### HINDUISM BUDDHISM AND TAMILS

**H**induism is the oldest living faith, yet the term "Hinduism", relatively speaking, is not that ancient. To the Hindus, it was known earlier as Sanatana Dharma (the Eternal Religion), for religion to them is a way of life. The term Hindu was used by the Persians in the eighth century AD in reference to the people who lived beyond the River Indus, the early name of which was Sindhu. Sindhu later became Hindu, the name of the people and Hinduism their religion. Today it refers to all those who accept the authority of the Vedas ( Hindu Scriptures ).

Hinduism without doubt is the oldest religion in Lanka. Sir William Jones, a reputed scholar, after investigation of various monuments of Hindu antiquity in Lanka expressed the following opinion. "This Island was peopled time out of memory by the Hindu race"<sup>1</sup>. Long, long before the historical Vijaya, as we have seen earlier, there were in Lanka five recognised isvarams of God Siva which claimed and received the adoration of the people of not only Lanka but also all India. These ancestral temples whose beginnings are steeped in tradition belong to a hoary past. These were, as mentioned earlier, Tiruketeeswaram ( near Mannar ), Munneswaram ( Chilaw ), Tondeswaram ( old Mantai ), Tirukoneswaram ( Trincomalee ) and Naguleswaram ( Kankesanturai ). As observed by Paul.E. Peiris, their situation in ancient times close to the ports were not the result of accident or caprice but the need to cater to the religious wants of a wealthy mercantile population. This is evidence not only to the antiquity of these temples but also to the presence of a Tamil Hindu population at all the major seaport towns of the island. Saint Tirumular who lived before the eight century hence referred to Ilankai as Sivapumi.

According to C.Rasanayagam, Munneswaram is the oldest of the isvarams or abodes of God Siva in Lanka. Harmonising with its hoary antiquity is the legend that Brahma worshipped at the temple in the Krita Yuga, Rama in the Trita Yuga and Vyasa in the Dwapara Yuga. It is believed that Sri Rama

during his sojourn in Lanka with his companions, spotted the shrine, lowered his chariot, came down, bathed in the river flowing by and installed a Siva lingam at the shrine. Tiruketeeswaram and Tirukoneswaram are equally reputed ancient Siva temples. Sekkilar in his immortal work, the Periyapuranam, has given a description of these two temples. The shrines are of particular interest as they have been sanctified in the hymns of the Saivite saints. The Dakshina Kailasa Manmiam and the Mantai Pallu are other works which relate about Tiruketeeswaram. Of Tiruketeeswaram, legends speak of the temple as having been built by Mayan, father of Mandodari, wife of Ravana. Sri Rama is believed to have worshipped at this temple, so too Arjuna in the course of his pilgrimage after the Mahabharata War. Both Trincomalee and Tirukoneswaram relate to Lord Ishwara or Siva. The name Trincomalee is the angлизized corruption of the Tamil name "tiru-kona-malai"=sacred angular hill. Its other Tamil name is "ko-karnam= Ear of the Lord". The Sinhala name for Trincomalee 'Gokarna' is thus derived from Ko-karnam. Thus these names are derived from the hallowed Hindu shrine dedicated to Lord Siva that stood on a high rocky promontory at the entrance to the harbour. King Ravana is said to have been a great devotee of the Lord of Koneswaram at Tirukonamalai ( Trincomalee ) and his devotion to Lord Siva is immortalised in the hymns of the Tamil Saiva saints. A cut in the rock "the Ravana Kalvettu" recalls that Ravana worshipped at the shrine. The visit of Kulakkodan, the Chola prince is the theme of the "Konesar Kalvettu" by Kavirayar mentioned in the Yalpana Vaipava Malai under the name of "Kavirasa Varothayan". It relates that "Rama Deva, son of Manunithi-Kanda Cholan of the solar race visited Tirukonamalai and after him, his son Kulakoddan came and repaired the temple and its towers, built the terraced halls and the sin-dispelling well. For the continuance of the service of Isvara, he brought fifty-seven families from Karai and Marungkar in Chola-nadu and settled them there".

As C.S.Navaratnam points out that when the legends, traditions and beliefs in such ancient works as the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Skanda Puranam are examined, we are led to believe that Hinduism was widely prevalent in Lanka from ancient times. It is seen that the Ramayana is firmly rooted in the traditions of the island. Thus Vibishana, the brother of Ravana is deified and worshipped even today at Kelaniya; so too Lakshmana ( Lak-Saman ), the brother of Rama in Sabaragamuva as Lord Saman. There is an ancient temple for Sita Amman at Sita-Eliya in Nuwara Eliya. Rama is said to have planted

his valiant bow at Villundy in Jaffna and from thence began a holy spring at this spot. Near Mannar is an island known as Thallady where Hanuman is said to have staggered while bringing the Sanjeev Parvata to the rescue of Lakshmana. Thallady in Tamil means staggering. Ravana is said to have performed the last funeral rites of his mother at the hot springs of Kanniya near Tirukonamalai.

Again it is not surprising that from the earliest times similar Hindu Gods and Goddesses were worshipped in India and Lanka. The early Tamils worshipped Siva and Murukan on top of hills. So we find Tiruvannamalai, Palani and Tiruthany as ancient places of such worship in India. In Ilankai too, ancient places of worship are on hills such as Kathiramalai Tirukonamalai and Keerimalai. In referring to the earliest tradition about Kathiramalai in the Skanda Puranam, P. Arunachalam observed that "The echoes of (a) contest live in a remote forest shrine in the south-eastern corner of the island called after him as Kartikeya Gramam or Katirgamam (Kataragama=Sinhalese) where after his victory, he wooed and won a chieftain's daughter who shares with him the worship of millions from Cashmere to Ceylon". This is also believed to be a story illustrating how the Veddahs, who were worshipping other gods, were converted to Saivism at an early stage of their history. The worship of the seven goddesses (Nachchimar or Saptamatrikas) was also prevalent in ancient Lanka. This cult is a link between India and Ilankai before the Puranic period. This is evidence again of the antiquity of Hinduism in the island.

Hinduism thus continued to be a living religion in the island from the earliest of times. While the ancestral shrines and other temples catered to the religious needs of the Tamil population, the religion also counted adherents among the Yakshas and Nagas. The Yakshas came to occupy the central, southern and eastern parts of the island and the Nagas the western and northern parts from pre-historic times. Being Dravidian races, they had imbibed the culture of the Indus Valley regarding the mother goddess, matriarchy and fertility cults as well as lingam worship. For instance, the lingam-yoni symbols on the Tissawewa inscription can be explained as symbols to ensure the fertility of the soil, irrigated by tank. The Nagas worshipped the Siva-lingam as those of them on the mainland of India. According to C.S.Navaratnam, the celebrated temple of Tiruketeeswaram and Nagarcoil ( temple of Nagar or Nagas ) on the eastern coast of Jaffna were closely associated with the Nagas.

The first kings of Lanka were undoubtedly Hindus before the official coming of Buddhism to the island in the reign of King Devanampiya Tissa (247-207 BC). Tamil tradition, as we have seen, has it that the historical Vijaya constructed and restored many Hindu temples in different parts of the island. During this early period, there is mention of brahmans ( brahmins ) in the Chronicles and Inscriptions of Lanka, showing their presence in large numbers. King Pandukabhaya had Pandula, a rich and learned brahman who taught him every accomplishment necessary for a king and provided him with money and soldiers to gain the throne. When he founded the city of Anuradhapura, he constructed special residences for them. Thus according to L.E. Blaze, "As the king himself and the people were followers of the Brahman religion, the Brahman priests were freely given temples, dwelling places and all else that they needed". Again as observed by S.Pathmanathan, "Archaeological remains show that there were several shrines at Anuradhapura mostly confined to the northern part of town. The Hindu ruins in the premises of that ancient capital include temples dedicated to Siva, Kali and Ganesa and Brahmins' quarters and other minor buildings". Some of these early kings and princes had names such as Siva, Mahasiva and Mutusiva. As B C Law says, "The ascetic god Siva had a good deal of hold over the religious beliefs of the people and it is manifest even from the personal names of Girikandasiva and King Mutusiva". King Mutusiva incidentally was the father of Devanampiya Tissa, the next king during whose time Buddhism was officially brought to the island.

When Buddhism and Jainism were first introduced into Tamilakam, about two centuries after the time of their illustrious founders, they were considered merely as systems of thought and were received with open arms. In Hinduism as one is aware, several systems of thought or philosophy abound. The new religions were also regarded as such and flourished side by side with Hinduism. By the third century BC, Buddhism was well established in the Tamil country. It continued to flourish throughout the Satavahana period; indeed the first two centuries of the Christian era constitute the most glorious epoch of Buddhism in South India. The spread of Buddhism in the Tamil country is attested by the inscriptions of Asoka in which he is stated as having sent missions to the four Tamil countries for preaching the Dharma and for establishing hospitals for men and animals. There were Buddhist settlements of considerable proportions in Nagapattinam on the east coast

and in Srimulavasam on the west coast. Kanchi ( Kanchipuram ), one of the seven most ancient and famous cities of India was a seat of learning where Vedic and non-Vedic schools such as Jaina and Buddha existed side by side. The existence of these several schools shows the religious activity of the people in the Tamil country. They were regarded as different sects rather than as different religions. Thus Saivism, Vaishnavism, Buddhism and Jainism were all prevalent and were allowed to prosper peacefully without persecution by the ancient kings. Religious tolerance extended to academia as well, for the Tamil Sangam counted Buddhists among its members. That all the sects were equally treated by the ancient kings may be inferred from the fact that the early Pallava rulers assumed such names as Buddharvarman, Skandavarman and Paramesvaravarman, names which indicated the sects to which they belonged.

Kanchi and Amaravati were great centres of Buddhist learning and culture. When Huien Tsang visited Kanchi in 640 AD, in Dravida, there were some one-hundred monasteries with ten-thousand monks. Prominent monks such as Buddhamitta ( புத்தமித்தீரா ), Acharya Buddhaghosa(ஆசாரிய புத்தகோச ), Buddhadatta ( புத்ததத்தா ), Bodhidharma ( போதித்துமா ), Dhammapala (துமபால ) and Dinnaga ( தின்னாகா ) were Tamils as also mentioned by Mylai Seeni Venkataswamy in his book , "Bavuthamum Tamizhum" in Tamil. None of them was a native of Lanka. There were close intellectual, religious and cultural contacts in early times between the Theravada centres of Lanka and the Theravada centres of South India such as Kanchipuram, Kaviripaddinam, Mathurai and Nagapattinam. Tamil Buddhist monks went out from these learned centres as missionaries of Buddhism. Dinnaga, a celebrated Buddhist logician was a student of Nalanda and later lived in Kanchi. Bodhidharma who went to China to preach the doctrine of the Buddha was also a monk from Kanchi. It was in this setting that "Manimekalai" the sublime Theravada Buddhist epic in Tamil tells the story of Manimekalai, the daughter of Madhavi by Kovalan. The epic is the work of Cheetalai-chattanar and is regarded as one of the finest jewels in Tamil literature. In the work, mention is made of the celebrated Buddhist teacher Ara-vana Adigal. The work is set against the historical and geographical background of Tamilakam and Manipallavam or Nagadipa ( Jaffna Peninsula). Unfortunately many of the earlier Tamil works on Buddhism are lost. But the few which have survived the ravages of time such as "Manimekalai", Kundalakesi and the later grammar "Virasoliyam" give us

vivid glimpses of the devotional spirit and zeal among Tamils who were Buddhists at that time. Among the books which became extinct, Venkataswamy mentions the Sithantha Tokai ( சித்தாந்தத் தொகை), Thiruppathikam (திருப்பதிகம் ), and Vimpasara Kathai (விம்பசார கதை ).

Before the official coming of Buddhism to Lanka in the reign of Devanampiya Tissa (247-207 BC), its advent was foreshadowed in the Pali Chronicles. The Dipavamsa and the Mahavamsa whose authors were Buddhist priests had as their primary purpose the establishment of Buddhism in the island. Thus according to B.C.Law, "The invention of pious legends regarding the inestimable favour done to the country and its inhabitants by the Buddha through his miraculous visits and acts of grace was not peculiar to the Chronicles of Ceylon. There were similar legends invented and cherished in other countries where Buddhism became the living faith of the people. But the Ceylon Chroniclers far excelled others in this art"<sup>7</sup>. On one of his mythical visits to the island, the Buddha had sought the expulsion of the Yakshas to prepare the ground for the coming of his religion. Hence significantly, were the words spoken in the Mahavamsa heralding the advent of Vijaya who was to secure the place for his ( the Buddha's ) religion. Thus the great Sage (Buddha) spoke to Sakka, "Vijaya, son of King Sinhabahu is come to Lanka from the country of Lala together with seven-hundred followers. In Lanka O Lord of gods will my religion be established, therefore carefully protect him with his followers and Lanka"<sup>8</sup>. According to K M de Silva, "This was to become in time the most powerful of the historical myths of the Sinhalese and the basis of their conception of themselves as the chosen guardians of Buddhism and of Sri Lanka itself as a place of special sanctity for the Buddhist religion". In a further attempt to underline this, the author of the Mahavamsa synchronises the advent of Vijaya to the island with the passing away (parinibbana) of the Buddha. The year of the demise of the Buddha is now reckoned to be 543 BC, though the Buddha Era of 483 BC was current in Lanka up till the fifteenth century before the revision of the Buddhist calender.

Buddhism, however, did not come to the island during the time of the mythical Vijaya. Its official coming as we have stated was much later during the reign of King Devanampiya Tissa (247-207 BC). The coming of Buddhism to the island was a defining moment in the history of the country and particularly in the history of the Sinhala people. But the account in the

Mahavamsa that it was brought to the island by Mahinda and Sanghamitta, the children of Emperor Asoka does not find any independent corroboration from outside the country. Thus according to Dr G.C.Mendis, "there is no independent record of any kind outside of Ceylon ( which ) supports the view that Mahinda was the son of Asoka"<sup>10</sup>. Dr Mendis believes it to be a pure invention. K.M.de Silva believes that Sanghamitta was a kinswoman of Asoka. The Indian tradition according to Professor L.Mukerjee is that "Buddhist missionaries led by Mahendra, a brother of Asoka, penetrated as far as the Tamraparni River in the Pandyan kingdom of South India"<sup>11</sup>. The Rock Edicts of Asoka ( II & XIII ) refer definitely to the Tamil kingdoms of South India--the Chola, Chera and Pandya kingdoms and to Tamraparni. Historians have been at pains to discover whether the Tamraparni mentioned refers to the well known Tinnevelly District in South India or to Lanka. W Geiger himself says, "I may observe that at the outset, it is not absolutely certain whether by Tambapanni of the inscriptions, Ceylon is meant. Possibly the name may designate the Tinnevelly district at the southern extremity of India where the Tambapanni flows into the sea"<sup>12</sup>. Vincent Smith calls the stories describing the conversion of Ceylon as "a tissue of absurdities"<sup>13</sup>. There is literary tradition in the Silappadikaram to indicate that Mahendra described as a brother of Asoka, visited the Tamil country as a Buddhist missionary and left behind a vihara at Kaviripaddinam. Asoka described as a great friend of Devanampiya Tissa in the Mahavamsa does not refer in his Edicts either to his friend or even to his own children who it is said had been sent by him as missionaries to Lanka. The Asokan Edicts make no mention whatever of the word "Lanka" by which name the country was known to the ancient Indians in the North. In such circumstances as T.R.Sesha Iyengar says, "it is reasonable to suppose that Asoka's missionaries to Ceylon passed through the Tamil country ( and even attempted to propagate the creed there ) in spite of the statement in the Mahavamsa that they flew in the air and arrived in Ceylon"<sup>14</sup>. According to K.M.Panikkar, "The first mission to Ceylon seems to have been led by Mahendra, the brother of the Emperor.....Mahendra was on a mission to South India and crossed to Ceylon from the Pandya country"<sup>15</sup>.

The mystery of the personal relationship of Mahinda and Sanghamitta with Asoka cannot be resolved in the light of Asoka's own records. But as B.C.Law says, "there is no valid reason as yet to dispute the fact of their going to Ceylon for the propagation of Buddhism during the reign of

Devanampiya Tissa who was a contemporary of Asoka<sup>16</sup>. According to Hiuen Tsang, Mahinda's missionary work had been directed to the country of Malayakuta situated in the extreme south of the Deccan, below Pandya. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that it is from the country of Malayakuta that Mahinda went across to Ceylon. The king, his court and his subjects were converted to Buddhism and the rulers of the dynasty became in time the patrons and protectors of the religion. Soon Buddhism became the most pervasive force in the kingdom. As Buddhism continued to flourish in South India during this period, so too it spread in Lanka against the established faith viz Hinduism. It drew its converts mainly from the Tamils apart from the Yakshas and the Nagas.

The contribution of Tamils and Brahmins to Buddhism in Lanka continued in the early centuries before and after the Christian era. The fact that Tamils donated caves and property to Buddhist monks reveals that large numbers of Tamils became Buddhists in Lanka. An important rock inscription in Brahmi characters was found at the Thalgahagoda Vihara in the Matale District. It was deciphered by Dr.S.Karunaratne of the Department of Archaeology as follows: "These two caves of the Tamil bhikkus were donated to the Sangha of the six directions"<sup>17</sup>. Thus the inscription is clear evidence of Tamil bhikkus having lived and worked in Lanka as far back as the second century BC. Also it has been seen that some of the Tamil "perumakans" ( chiefs ) bear Buddhist personal names while being loyal to their ethnic identity and culture. Sinhala writers very often assume that all Sinhala people in ancient times were Buddhists and Tamil people were Hindus. That this was not so has been seen even as late as the Elalan-Duthagamani war where there were Tamil Buddhists on Duthagamani's side. This error of assuming that Buddhists were only found among the Sinhala people is perpetuated whenever ancient Buddhist ruins are excavated especially in the east and north of the country. A case in point is the Buddhist remains in Kanterodai which only shows that there were Buddhists among the Tamils during this period. The inscriptions from very early times and literary works from the first century AD prove that Buddhism made strong inroads among the Tamil people and many were converted to the new faith. This was also a time when a Sinhala identity was yet to emerge and ethnicity was not an issue. The rulers were patrons of Buddhism and the close links between State and religion were being established. This saw in time, however, the beginnings of

Sinhala ethnic consciousness arise with Buddhism as its first constitutive element.

To continue the story of the Tamils' contribution to Buddhism, we witness that in the reign of Voharaka Tissa (269-291 AD), some Vaitulyans came to Lanka and the new doctrine of Mahayanism became popular with the monks of the Abhayagiri Vihara. At the same time, there lived a learned monk by the name of Sanghamitta ( சங்கமித்தீரா ) in the Chola country who visited the island to spread the new sect. King Gothabhaya who met this learned monk was so taken up by his scholarship that he appointed him tutor to his two sons. This monk returned to the island during the reign of King Mahasena who favoured the new doctrine. However Mahasena's methods of imposing the new doctrine led to opposition and reversal to the old faith. Another Tamil monk was Buddhadatta Maha Thero ( புத்தத்த மகாதேரா ) from the Chola country too. He lived during the fifth century. He joined the Maha Vihara fraternity and wrote many religious books. In Lanka, he wrote the Janalankara Danta-dathu Bodhivamsa. Another was Anurudha Thera ( அனிருத்த தேரா ) from South India whose book Abhidammartha Sangraha was popular in Lanka and Burma. In the reign of Mahanama (406-428AD) there arrived in Lanka an Indian monk who may be called the second founder, of Buddhism in the island. He is Acharya Buddha-ghosa, known as the "Voice of Buddha" on account of his great learning and eloquence. In one of his works, he refers to his close connections with South India and mentions Kanchi as one of the places visited by him. His ethnicity is said to be Tamil and he is believed to be a brahmin by birth. C.Rasanayagam believes that he was a native of Kanchi. In Anuradhapura, he compiled the Visuddhi-magga or the Path of Purity in which the teachings of the Tipitaka were summarised. He translated the six earlier commentaries into Pali of which one was from Kanchi and another from South India. Most probably they were in Tamil. He undoubtedly is the greatest Theravada Buddhist commentator and his commentaries are the authorities on the doctrine of Buddhism. As may be seen, there was a good deal of cultural intercourse between South India and the countries outside India such as Lanka. Great Buddhist teachers visited other Buddhist countries to learn and teach. Many of the teachers lived in the Maha Vihara at Anuradhapura. Thus Kanchi in South India was both a great centre of Buddhist learning as well as a centre from which learned monks went forth in the region to propagate Buddhism. What one may say by way

of conclusion is that the Tamil contribution to Buddhism is undoubtedly outstanding during this early period of Buddhism in Lanka.

It is also necessary to understand the influence of Hinduism on Buddhism in Lanka. To do so we need to look back to India and to the rise of Buddhism in the land of its birth. The Buddha himself was a Hindu and lived and died a Hindu. He looked upon himself more as a reformer than an innovator. It should be noted that Buddhism first originated as a reaction to certain features of Hinduism. It opposed all forms of sacrifices, rituals and the worship of images. It also opposed the Brahmanical caste system. Its doctrines were solely directed to saving the individual from the fire of his desires. Buddhism assumed that to escape from the cycle of rebirth was the goal and whole purpose of life. In the age of the Upanishads (800-600 BC), Hinduism was full of rituals and ceremonies. For the performance of these, the Brahmins were indispensable. This ascendancy of the Brahmins was resisted by the Kshatriyas, the kingly class to which the Buddha belonged. The period also witnessed an upsurge in new ideas when attempts were made to understand the origin and destiny of man. There were many schools of thought at this time. Each tried to find a solution for the salvation of man from his bondage--self-realization or moksha. Many of the religious systems which arose at this time had an untimely end. Of the four which continue to play a role even today are Saivism, Vaishnavism, Buddhism and Jainism. The first two were theistic and centred around the two pre-Vedic deities, Siva and Vishnu respectively. The last two have no veneration for gods at all. Buddhism and Jainism imply a system of philosophy of the Upanishads, though in varying degrees. Early Buddhists accepted the teachings of the Upanishads but were hostile to Brahmanism. The theory of Karma and Rebirth was adopted by Buddhism from the Hindu Scriptures. The ascetic life of a sannyasin, one of the four stages of Hindu life was absorbed by Buddhism. The doctrine of Ahimsa, one of the important tenets of Hinduism was re-emphasised in Buddhism. The Vedas had been repeatedly referred to in the "Nikayas" as compositions of sages but the belief of union with Brahman was rejected by the followers of the Buddha. The Brahminic claim of superiority in caste was challenged by the Buddhists but the caste system was tacitly accepted with the Kshatriyas as the highest caste. As the cult of images and symbols was widely prevalent among Hindus from pre-Vedic times, the early Buddhists though opposed to images and symbols, represented the Buddha by symbols such as the Footprint, the Stupa and the

Bo-tree. In brief, it may be said that Buddhism adopted a middle path in its doctrine and observances. Likewise, Buddhism too has influenced Hinduism; some Hindus have even gone to the extent of regarding the Buddha as an avatar (re-incarnation) of Vishnu.

The Pandya, Chola and Pallava civilizations that animated the people of South India also influenced Buddhism and its followers. The successive waves of Tamil migrants, the periodic invasions by Tamil princes and the mercenary soldiers raised by Lankan kings from South India to fight for them, all brought to bear on the island a strong Hindu element. The marriages of Lankan kings to Tamil and Hindu princesses from South India, beginning with Vijaya had a profound effect on the Sinhala Royal Court. The queens and their courtiers encouraged Hindu practices and rituals. As P.Arunachalam observed, "Throughout Ceylon history, the Court religion was Hinduism and its ritual and worship largely alloyed and affected the popular Buddhism and made it very unlike the religion of the Buddha"<sup>18</sup>. Thus Buddhism in Lanka as in India grew in an Hindu environment. This made for harmonious relations between the Buddhists and the Hindus in ancient times. As we have mentioned, there were sacred Hindu sites such as Kathirgamam / Kataragama which became a place of worship of Buddhists as well. Religion was not a point of division between the Tamils and the emerging Sinhala polity in those early times. Nor can a holy war said to have been waged in the interests of Buddhism, as the Duthagamani-Elara War is portrayed in the Mahavamsa.



## CHAPTER X

### NAGA AND TAMIL KINGS ON THE ANURADHAPURA THRONE

Naga kingdoms have existed in Lanka from very ancient times. Both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata refer to highly civilised Naga kingdoms under well-established laws. We have seen that Naga kingdoms existed not only in India and Lanka but also in far off Java. The Nagas must have been very early emigrants to Lanka from the South Indian mainland with a maritime and agricultural culture. Hence they were great navigators and clever pirates as well as skilled in irrigation works and industrial arts. As observed by H.Parker, "The Nagas were considered to be a comparatively civilised race----They were ruled by their own kings and had a settled form of government". According to C.Rasanayagam, a Naga kingdom was existing in Jaffna from the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC, the period allotted to the events described in the Mahabharata. The Mahavamsa states that the Naga strongholds in the sixth century BC were at Nagadipa in the North and at Kalyani on the west coast of Lanka. The northern kingdom as we have seen was in the beginning known as Cheran-tivu or Serantivu, the island of the Cheras or Seras. As the Chera tribe were serpent-worshippers, they came to be called Nagas by Sanskrit writers and Cheran-tivu came to be referred to as Nagadipa particularly by Buddhist writers. In Tamil, it was called Naganadu or Nagativu. In the second century AD, A.C. Ptolemy, the Greek geographer, compiled a map of Lanka and his Nagadiboi is identical with Nagadipa, the northern kingdom. The Tamil epic poem, the Manimekalai written about the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, has referred to a king of Nagadipa as, "He who rules over the Naga country without fear". The western kingdom was called Kalyani or Kalani (கலானி). The Tamil word stood for an agricultural district. The present Kelaniya was Kalani in the ancient past, a territory occupied by agriculturists and the river Kelani Ganga took its name accordingly.

The kingdom of Nagadipa has been identified with the Jaffna Peninsula. In commenting on the Vallipuram gold plate inscription, S.Paranavitana concluded that, "as the site of the religious foundation is within the Jaffna Peninsula, it follows that Nagadipa and the Jaffna Peninsula are identical"<sup>2</sup>. This kingdom however according to C.Rasanayagam was not confined to the Jaffna Peninsula

alone but extended also over the greater part of the Vannis including the present Punakari and Mannar districts. As mentioned earlier, H.Parker too referred to a town north of Anuradhapura which may have been the boundary of the Dravidian territory ie of Nagadipa. It was in a flourishing condition in those early days. Kadiramalai ( Kanterodai ) was its capital and Mantai its port. So great a port town was Mantai that it was referred to as a kingdom in ancient Tamil classics. The author of the Periplus says, "Formerly Taprobane lies out in the open sea to the West. The northern part is civilised and frequented by vessels equipped with masts and sails"<sup>3</sup>-an obvious reference to Mantai and the northern kingdom. On the otherhand, as K.M.de Silva has pointed out, at no stage in the island's early history was the economy of the Anuradhapura kingdom based on trade; more importantly that this situation did not change with the growth in power and wealth of the Anuradhapura kingdom. This clearly shows that the island's external trade was very much out of the Naga kingdom and in the hands largely of the Tamils. There were also colonies of Tamil merchants in Anuradhapura. As observed by Pathmanathan, the lucrative trade between Lanka and the Tamil kingdoms of South India, in pearls, precious stones, spices, elephants and cloth was largely in the hands of merchants operating from Malabar and the Coromandel.

The Naga rulers both in India and Lanka intermarried with the royal families of the Tamils and in India they were readily admitted into the north Indian dynasties. We have seen this in the case of the Maghadan dynasty producing a royal line which included Emperor Asoka. With the first dynasty established by the historical Vijaya, it was not long before, that we see it happening in Lanka as well. The first person in the line of Lankan kings at Anuradhapura who went under the name of a Naga was Maha Naga, the brother of Devanampiya Tissa. He could not have been called a Naga, if his parents or ancestors had not had Naga connections. It is most likely according to C.Rasanayagam, that it was King Mutusiva (307-247 BC) who was the first to marry a Naga princess. Since Kelani Tissa, son of Maha Naga later became the king of Kalyani, ( a Naga kingdom ) his mother must have been a princess from that kingdom. From that time Naga connections became rather common until they culminated in the marriage of Gaja Bahu who married also a Naga princess from Nagadipa (Jaffna). Maha Naga's great grandson Kakavana Tissa married Vihara Mahadevi, the daughter of Kelani Tissa, the Naga king of Kalyani. She was the mother of Duthagamani, one of the greatest kings of Lanka and the hero of the Mahavamsa. Duthagamani's younger brother Saddha Tissa had a son called

Kallata Naga and his brother Vattagamini had a son called Maha Naga who afterwards was known as Cora Naga because of his misdeeds. Hence these names ending in Naga clearly testify to the fact that one of the parents was a Naga or that in any case they were descendants of Nagas. An ear ornament in the form of the hood of the cobra can be seen on the statue of King Vattagamani (88-76 BC). Among the Nagas, the symbol of the cobra was in common use as a favourite ornament.

King Ananda Gamini (21-30 AD) had a nephew called Ila Naga who was deposed by his attendants, the Lambakannas ( so called because of the heavy ear ornaments worn by them ). K.M. de Silva observes that according to tradition the Lambakannas had come to the island in the time of Devanampiya Tissa with the sacred bo-tree. But according to C. Rasanayagam it is evident that the Lambakannas were either Nagas or mixed Tamils and Nagas from Nagadipa and became the kings' attendants on account of their Naga connections. The term Lambakannas applied to the kings thereafter designates that the Naga princes of Jaffna had already mixed with the Tamils. So powerful did the Lambakanna clan become that it battled with the Moriya clan for the right to the throne. One significant feature thus of the political history of Anuradhapura during this period was that the right to the throne appeared to be with one or the other of the two powerful clans, the Lambakannas and the Moriys. By the beginning of the first century AD, the Lambakannas were established in power. The opposition came mostly from the Moriys who became in time their chief rivals for power. Their periodic struggles for the throne were a conspicuous feature of the history of the Anuradhapura period. The Lambakannas established themselves on the throne with Vasabha (67-111 AD) till the death of Mahanama (428 AD) when the Moriys returned to power under Dhatusena. It is said that Vasabha before his accession to the throne was a Lambakanna youth resident in the North (Mahavamsa Chap. xxxv). It is thus evident that the Lambakannas were either Nagas or mixed Tamils and Nagas from Nagadipa. According to C.Rasanayagam, "the statue of a king which is carved on a rock at Weligama and called Kushta Raja must be one of these Lambakannas, as could be seen from the elongated earlobes and the heavy ear ornaments made to rest on his shoulders".

Gaja Bahu (113-135 AD) married a Naga princess from Jaffna. When he went to do battle with the Cholas, he marched to Jaffna and thence to "Soli Rata" (Chola kingdom). On his death he was succeeded by his father-in-law Mahallaka

Naga (135-141 AD). By this time the kings of Anuradhapura had by alliances with the Nagas, Tamils and others become very mixed. The Nagas of the north also became more powerful and asserted their authority as kings at Anuradhapura. The following is a list of kings of Lanka after Gaja Bahu taken from the Mahavamsa.

1) Mahallaka Naga or Mahalla Na	135 AD
2) Bhatika Tissa (son)	141 AD
3) Kaniththa Tissa (brother)	165 AD
4) Cula Naga or Sulu Na	193 AD
5) Kudda Naga (brother)	195 AD
6) Siri Naga I (brother-in-law)	196 AD
7) Woharaka Tissa (son)	215 AD
8) Abhaya Naga (brother)	237 AD
9) Siri Naga II (nephew)	245 AD
10) Vijaya (son)	247 AD

(The name Tissa is also a Naga name; in Tamil = Theesan)

The succession of one Naga by another is evidence of their complete control of the kingdom. Although the Mahavamsa does not refer to it as a Naga dynasty, the numerous kings bearing the suffix "naga" clearly shows the integration and fusion of the Vijayan dynasty of Pandyan with the Nagas. Nineteen kings bore the name Naga and fourteen kings bore Tamil names. The University History of Ceylon refers to this dynasty as the Lambakanna dynasty. As we have seen the Lambakannas were a mixed Naga and Tamil dynasty. They were so called because of the heavy ear ornaments (குத்தன்) worn by them, a Tamil custom. H.W. Codrington refers to the Lambakanna Lemeni as "having ears with long lobes" branch of the royal family.

There is also good reason to believe that the ruling dynasty at Anuradhapura got its lion emblem from the Nagas of the northern kingdom. According to S. Rasanayagam, who quotes the Mahabharata (Aswamedha Parva see Lxxxix pp 192-290), Vavravahan while fighting against Arjuna "raised his standard which was decorated most beautifully and which bore the device of a lion" and "his flag decked with gold and resembling a golden palmyrah on the King's car was cut off" by Arjuna. This standard displaying a lion appears therefore to have been the one used by the Naga kings of North Lanka. long before the advent of Vijaya. It is most probable that when the Nagas of the northern kingdom

married into the Anuradhapura dynasty, their emblem of the lion became the emblem of that dynasty. This may have happened after King Mutusiva (307-247 BC) married a Naga princess and Naga domination of that dynasty followed as evidenced by the Naga kings who sat on the Anuradhapura throne. As referred to earlier, R.A.L.H.Gunawardena states that "it is very likely that the lion was the emblem of the ruling house of Lanka and that the dynasty got its name from the emblem"<sup>5</sup>. With the growth of Sinhala consciousness, the island came to be called Sihaladipa, the island of the Sihalas, in the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries and this name reflected the claim of the ruling house to political power in the island.

We may now turn to the Tamil kings who sat upon the Anuradhapura throne. It is clearly seen that for a thousand years after the advent of the historical Vijaya, central power at Anuradhapura passed through several changes of dynasty. As the University History of Ceylon says not all the rulers listed had effective control over the island. On the contrary, it is evident that Lanka was not one single country in the ancient period. Furthermore as K.M. de Silva points out, "In no phase of its history was the political system so brittle than in what may be termed the early Anuradhapura period"<sup>6</sup>. That was not all, for apart from the changes due to dynastic rivalry during this period, we also witness the capture of the Anuradhapura throne by Tamil princes from the South Indian mainland. It is a curious feature of Lankan history that its kings were readily accepted although they hailed from Pandya, Chola, Kalinga and Nayakar dynasties except when they came as invaders. There were periods in the early history of Lanka when the throne of its kings at Anuradhapura actually fell into the hands of the Tamils from abroad. According to K.M.de Silva, "These Dravidian attempts at establishing control over the Anuradhapura kingdom appear to have been motivated partly at least by the prospect of domination over its external trade"<sup>7</sup>. Thus the first such occasion was when two Tamil horse-traders named Senan (Sena) and Guttikan (Guttaka) killed the ruling king and usurped his throne. Coming at the head of an army, they overpowered King Saratissa (187-177 BC) and ruled Anuradhapura jointly for a not inconsiderable period of twenty-two years (177-155 BC) before the original dynasty was restored.

But the Tamils from South India re-established themselves ten years later again, when Elalan ( Elara ), a prince of the Chola dynasty seized the throne and established his rule for a period of forty-four years (145-101 BC). The dethroned dynasty took refuge in Magampattu on the southern coast of the island. According to L.E. Blaze, "Although Elara could not conquer the kings of

Kelaniya and Ruhuna, he made them pay tribute to him year by year and acknowledge him as king of Lanka"<sup>8</sup>. The chronicle Rajavaliya in recording this says that, "in those days King Kavantissa residing in Magama of Ruhuna, paid tribute to the Tamil king". King Elalan was the greatest Tamil king to sit on the throne of Lanka and his rule was noted for its righteousness. According to the Pali Chronicles, "he ruled the kingdom for forty-four years, administering justice impartially to friend and foe alike"<sup>9</sup>. At the gate of his palace hung according to the custom of the Chola kings, the " Arachchi Mani" or bell of inquiry communicating with the head of his bed and the ringing of which secured immediate inquiry and redress of grievances. Though not a Buddhist ,he respected the Buddhist religion and gave what money and other gifts were needed to support the Buddhist priests and their viharas. In the tradition of Tamil kings of those times, he respected and supported all sects in a spirit of religious tolerance.

While Elalan reigned at Anuradhapura, the deposed dynasty under King Kakavana Tissa ( Kavantissa ) were in Ruhuna. The King had two sons Gamani and Tissa. When Gamani grew up his one thought was of recapturing Anuradhapura and establishing his rule in the northern plains. But his father fearful that his son might lose his life in a war stood in the way. He accused his father of cowardice and to avoid his father's anger fled to the Malaya district (Hill Country ). He thus earned the epithet "Dutha" and came to be known thereafter as Duthagamani--Gamani the undutiful. On his father's death, he returned, deposed his brother from the throne and prepared for war. Starting from Magama, he first captured Mahiyangana. He then tried to cross the Mahaweli Ganga but the ferry was so strongly guarded by the Tamils that it took four months before he succeeded. Fort after fort thereafter fell into Duthagamani's hands. The strongly fortified town of Vijitapura was the next to fall after four months of fierce fighting. Before he finally advanced on Anuradhapura, Duthagamani had to defeat thirty-two Tamil rulers according to the Chronicles. The attack on Anuradhapura was averted by King Elalan who in order to spare the destruction of the city challenged Duthagamani to a duel. King Elalan died in the duel. After his death, Duthagamani ruled from Anuradhapura for twenty-four years (101-77 BC).

The Duthagamani-Elalan war is the centre-piece of the Mahavamsa and the author of the Chronicle has portrayed Duthagamani as a Sinhala hero in an ethnic and religious contest between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Thus in the

words of K.M. de Silva, "The long-fifteen year-campaign waged by Duthagamani against Elara which culminated in a duel----is dramatised as the central theme of the later chapters of the Mahavamsa as an epoch-making confrontation between Sinhalese and Tamils and extolled as a holy war fought in the interests of Buddhism"<sup>10</sup>. The facts of the war however show that it was more a contest to regain control of the northern plains and to drive away the foreign invader. Again as K.M. de Silva writes further, "The Mahavamsa account of these events glosses over the facts and events which were inconvenient to its prime consideration of immortalising the honour and glory attaching to Duthagamani"---."Besides the facile equating of Sinhalese with Buddhist for this period is not borne out by the facts for not all Sinhalese were Buddhists while on the otherhand there were many Tamil Buddhists. There were in fact large reserves of support for Elara among the Sinhalese and Duthagamani, as a prelude to his encounter with Elara, had to face the resistance of other Sinhalese rivals who appeared to be more apprehensive of his political ambitions than they were concerned about Elara's continued domination of the northern plains. Nor did Duthagamani's campaigns end with the capture of Anuradhapura. He was bringing the northern plain under a single authority for the first time and Elara was only one of his adversaries"<sup>11</sup> The above observations show clearly the war in its proper perspective. Again some evidence in the Mahavamsa itself suggests that not all people who fought against Duthagamani were Tamils. For instance, Nandamitta a general in Duthagamani's army is said to have had an uncle who was a general serving Elara (Mah. XXIII, 4-5). In another instance, it is mentioned that the Sinhalese are said to have killed their compatriots because they had not been able to identify their foe (Mah.XXV,16-17). Such a situation could have occurred only if there had been a substantial number of Sinhalese in Elara's army.

Once peace had been restored in his kingdom, Duthagamani is credited with the building of the famous Brazen Palace ( Lova Maha Paya ), a monastery for monks and the Ruwanweli Dagoba among numerous other viharas. But a brave man respects bravery even in his enemies and in keeping with the chivalry of the times, Duthagamani did not fail in his duty towards his dead foe, the Tamil king. He had a tomb built on the spot where Elalan died and ordered that whomsoever should pass the tomb, even if he were king, should go on foot in silence. That order, it is understood, was still being obeyed two-thousand years later in 1818 when a Kandyan chief escaping the British, got down and walked a distance as he was not sure of the exact spot where the tomb stood. Again, though the

Chronicles are silent, according to a Sinhala tradition, Duthagamani rebuilt and endowed the temple of Lord Skanda at Kataragama in fulfilment of his vows. After Duthagamani's time, the Tamils from South India were a source of continuing harrassment to the Lankan monarchy when they made incursions into Lanka. Around 44 BC, Valagam Bahu, after a short reign of five months, lost his kingdom, his queen and the most precious treasure in Lanka, the Buddha's begging bowl. Seven Tamil chiefs from Pandya landed at Mantota and after a battle at Kolambalaka ( a village between Mantota and Anuradhapura), the Lankan king was beaten and fled to safety. One of the Tamil chiefs captured Valagam Bahu's beautiful queen and returned with her back to India. Another went back to India taking with him the Buddha's begging bowl. But the other five stayed behind and governed the country for fifteen years. As narrated in the Mahavamsa, "five members of the Pandyan dynasty---Pulahatta, Bahiya, Panayamara, Pliyamaraka and Dhatika ----ruled in political partnership for a total period of fifteen years from 44 to 29 BC"<sup>12</sup>. After that period, Valagam Bahu returned, defeated the last Tamil ruler and ruled over his people once again.

King Mahasena (274-301 AD) was the last king in the line of the Great Kings--Mahavamsa--and with his death in 301 AD, the Mahavamsa line came to an end. This may also be taken as marking the end of the early Anuradhapura period. There were many kings who reigned after Mahasena, who were greater in character as in deeds but as they were said to belong to a line of lower rank and mixed blood, they were called the Culavamsa--the lower line of kings. During this later Anuradhapura period, the Tamils from South India came again before the reign of King Dhatusena. There were seven of them and they ruled together for a period of twenty-five years. Dhatusena (455-473 AD) was able to expel them and to bring the country under his rule. Sanghatissa (614 AD) was the last king in the Moriya clan established by Dhatu Sena. Sixty years of civil war ensued following the end of his rule before the Lambakannas established their supremacy through Manavamma (684-718 AD) once again.

This second Lambakanna dynasty gave the island two centuries of relative stability. The Moriya challenge to the Lambakannas fizzled out by the end of the seventh century. However disputed successions rather than dynastic conflicts became the root cause of political instability during this period. The most celebrated of these succession disputes was that between Moggallana and Kassapa. The reliance of Moggallana (491-508 AD) on an army of South Indian

Tamil mercenaries to dislodge Kassapa proved in the long run to be more significant than his victory over the latter. The early mercenaries were entirely made up of Tamils. The employment of these Tamil mercenaries increasingly from the seventh century onwards led to the further growth of Tamil settlements in the north central region or Rajarata. These mercenaries became in time a vitally important if not the most powerful element in the armies of the Sinhala kings. Some of these rulers, notably Aggabodhi III (628, 629-639) and Dathopatissa I (circa 639-650) depended on them because they owed their positions largely to their support. According to K.M.de Silva, "they were also the nucleus of a powerful influence in the Court"<sup>13</sup>.

After two centuries of relative peace, pressure from the Tamils of South India began thereafter. Agbo IV who kept the Tamils at bay to some extent found it safer towards the close of his reign to move to Polonnaruwa, fifty miles south-east of Anuradhapura where he died. On his death, a Tamil named Potta-kutha was so powerful that he was able to choose two persons one after another to be kings of Lanka in name while he himself held the real power. A hundred years after Agbo IV, the Anuradhapura period of Lankan history may be said to have come to an end. King Mihindu V, the last king to rule from Anuradhapura was captured by the Cholas in 1017 and died in captivity in South India. The early history of Lanka may be said to end with the fall of Anuradhapura to the Cholas.

Before concluding this chapter, some mention of the events in the north of the island, which was increasingly being occupied by the Tamils from South India, would be necessary to bring developments there up to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. After references to the northern Naga kingdom by the end of the third century ceased, little is known of the happenings there between the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. A first authoritative account of the continued existence of a separate king in Jaffna was that of the Egyptian Greek monk Cosmas in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. He stated that, "there were two kings ruling at opposite ends of the Island one of whom possesses the hyacinth and the other the district in which are the port and emporium for the emporium in that place is the greatest in those parts". Sir Emerson Tennent commenting later on , on this passage said that, "the king in whose dominion was the great port and emporium was of course the Rajah of Jaffna". In the Vakkaleri plates of the Chalukya king Kirtivarman II of 757 AD, it is mentioned that Vinayaditya Satyasraya, one of his predecessors levied tribute from the "rulers of Kavera, Parasika, Simhala and other islands". According to S. Rajanayagam, "by the words other islands were meant Jaffna

and its dependent islands and it can be inferred that a separate king was ruling over them"<sup>14</sup>. As the authority wielded by the later kings of Anuradhapura was spasmodic, it is not known for the present whether the Naga-vamsa kings continued to rule in the northern kingdom or became merged at some stage with a line of Tamil kings.

About the 8-9<sup>th</sup> centuries, Pallava supremacy began to wane in South India. Among the Sinhalas, internal dissensions were rife. Tamil influence was gaining ground in the Sinhala capital as Sinhala princes fought each other with the aid of Tamil armies. It is not surprising that Ugra Singan from Kalinga in South India found an opportunity at this time ( circa 795 AD) to seize the throne of Jaffna in the north and establish himself as an independent sovereign at Kadirimalai (Kantherodai). According to the Yalpana Vaipava Malai , " he reigned at Kadirimalai while another king reigned over the southern territories" (p 8). He later shifted his capital to Singai-nagar near present day Vallipuram. Thus according to S. Rajanayagam, "Ugra Singan was probably the progenitor of that virile dynasty that later supplied the Kalinga Chakravaties to the throne of Polonnaruwa and the Arya Chakravaties to the throne of Jaffna"<sup>15</sup>. Two incidents are worth mentioning which happened during Ugra Singan's rule. One, he marched through the Vannis and received the voluntary submission of the seven Vanniyan chieftains and imposed a tribute upon them as mentioned in the Yalpana Vaipava Malai (p 9). The other is that Ugra Singan fell in love with Marutappiravikavalli, a Chola princess who came on a pilgrimage to Kirimalai, carried her off and married her, a political move intended to raise himself in the estimation of his people. This is also the story of Marutappiravikavalli who was directed in a vision to bathe in the wells of Kirimalai. She did so and her horse-like face was transformed to a beautiful face. This is how Maviddapuram (ma=horse, vidda=left, puram=town) the place got its name. Ugra Singan assisted his wife to complete the building of the Kandasamy temple which she had begun before her marriage. At her request, her father the Chola king sent the Brahmin Periyamanathular of Chidambaram to officiate at the temple with the images. The main image of Kankeyan (another name for Kandasamy) along with the other images was landed at a port which from that date came to be called after Him as Kankesanthurai.( This was the port that was earlier known as Kasathurai or Gayathurai).

Ugra Singan was succeeded by his son Jeyatunga Vara Raja Singan (Yalpana Vaipava Malai pp 12-13). According to tradition, it was during the reign of king

Jeyatunga that a minstrel, a Panan by caste from South India, came to his Court and was presented with a sandy tract (manattidal= மணத்தில்) of Jaffna as a reward for his music and songs (Yalpana Vaipava Malai p 13). He is referred to as a blind poet by the name of Veera-ragavan. This legend of the minstrel also appears in the Kailaya Malai, Vaiyapadal, Tiruconamalai Kalvettu and Dakshina Kailasa Puranam. In none of these however is the name of the man given ; nor is he anywhere described as blind. The Panan returned to India and induced some members of his tribe to accompany him to the promised land. The place of their settlement was that part of the city of Jaffna which is presently known as Pasaiyur and Gurunagar ( Karaiyur). As the Panars were also fishermen by vocation, they took to fishing for want of a better occupation in Jaffna. This settlement in honour of the lutist came to be called " Yalpanam" or "Yarlpanam" after the Yalpadi (lutist). Later on in the 10-11th centuries Muslim travellers referred to Yalpanam as Zapage, Zabaj, or Jabeh in mutilated forms. It was the Portuguese who, much later on in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when they occupied it, built a town close to the Panar settlement. They called Yalpana pattinam in their parlance as Jafana Patao. From Jafana was derived the present name of Jaffna . Though the name Jaffna is now used in a wider sense to include the whole district, yet to the people of Jaffna, it is only the town that is still referred to as Yalpanam or Yalpana pattinam.

By the tenth century, the first phase of Tamil settlements which began from prehistoric times may be said to have been completed. According to S.Arasaratnam, "research on the laws of the Ceylon Tamil peoples seems to indicate that most of the settlers of this early stage came from the Malabar coast<sup>16</sup>". This is true as well of the early Nagas who occupied Naganadu or Nagadipa. This is understandable as trading and migratory movements were in evidence from very early times among the peoples of this coast. They seem to have handed down to succeeding colonists some elements of their early social structure. Subsequently the people of Malabar on the mainland broke away from the mainstream of the Tamil language when they evolved for themselves a separate language (Malayalam) from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards. This left the Malabar settlers of Ilankai though Tamil-speaking with a different social organisation from the other Tamil communities on the mainland. As for a Tamil kingdom in the north, there is a school which holds that a Tamil kingdom existed from classical times following on the Naga kingdom, Naganadu or Nagadipa. In the words of S. Arasaratnam (1964) again, " the state of Tamil studies in Ceylon, in particular the almost complete absence of any archaeological work in the Jaffna peninsula,

does not help us to confirm or reject this hypothesis<sup>17</sup>". Archaeological excavations in particular since 1964 have shown the existence of a megalithic culture belonging to the Dravidian peoples in the pre-historic period in many parts of the island including the Jaffna Peninsula. This is evidence of early Tamil settlements. A Naga kingdom existed from very early times up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. This was followed by a fusion of Tamils and Nagas as shown and references to a kingdom in the north. While it is admitted that there is a need for more archaeological and other work in this area, the existence of such a kingdom in the north ruled by a separate king from time to time, as seen, cannot be ruled out during this period between the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

It is evident that the early history of Lanka from pre- or proto-historic times to the end of the Anuradhapura period in the tenth century was largely influenced by the Tamils both here and from South India. As we have shown, the first dynasty established in the island is seen to be a Pandyan dynasty. Again the names of several kings from the time of Maha Naga (207 BC ) to Mahanama (428 AD) ended with the suffix Naga. They belonged mainly to the first Lambakanna dynasty, a mixed Tamil and Naga dynasty. With the establishment of the second Lambakanna dynasty by Manavamma from 648 AD, there was increased co-operation with the Pallavas of South India. Again none of the kings during this period were of Aryan or North-Indian descent; none ever even claimed Aryan descent. We also see that Tamil influences during this entire period were widespread as seen in the commercial, cultural, political and military affairs of the island. Such being the case, it would be a misnomer to call this period the north Indian period of Lankan history as some historians have done. It has been shown that there was no colonisation or settlement of the island by North Indian tribes. Buddhism was brought to the island by the Asokan missionaries who came initially to the island through South India. Moreover, the contribution of the Tamils from South India to Buddhism's advancement and spread in the island during this early period was immense. Above all, there were close and continuous contacts between the Tamil kingdoms of South India and Lanka right through this period as we shall also see in the next chapter.. Hence, it would be more appropriate to call this ancient period, the South Indian period of Lankan history.



## CHAPTER XI

### RELATIONS BETWEEN TAMIL KINGDOMS OF SOUTH INDIA AND LANKA

Given its proximity, South India, as we have seen, exerted profound and enduring influences on Lanka from ancient times. The parts of Lanka which were developed and civilised in those early days were the Naga kingdoms in the north and west of the island. At the same time, the north-western coast with its seaport towns in particular was dotted with Tamil settlements as evidenced by the ruins of temples and tanks with Tamil place names. Commencing from Muneeswaram in Chilaw, this extended northwards through Puttalam, Pompa-rippu(golden plains), Nanattan, Musali, Mantai, Vadaltaltivu, Pallavarayankattu Punakari, Kalmunai and Kantherodai (in Jaffna). The south-eastern part of the island with Kathirgamam also showed evidence of Pandyan principalities in existence from the earliest times. Given the Dravidian origins of the Tamils and Nagas, it was also natural that Ilankai (Lanka) or Elam came within the commercial and cultural ambit of the Tamil kingdoms of South India during this period. Culturally as we have seen, Elamandalam was regarded as one of five divisions of Tamilakam and writers and poets from Elam also submitted their works to the Tamil Sangam.

We will in this chapter be dealing with the political relations between Ilankai and the Tamil kingdoms of South India as seen from the side of the latter. With every wave of immigration and settlement of Tamils in the island, Tamil presence and influence continued to grow. It led to the Tamil kingdoms of South India influencing the political developments on the island as well. As S.Paranavitana observed, "The Dravidian peoples influenced the course of the island's history about the same time they gained mastery over the South Indian kingdoms"<sup>1</sup>.

With the rise of the Tamil kingdoms of Pandya, Chola and Chera in South India, there followed a period of great material prosperity and development of fine

arts and culture. This prosperity was based largely on foreign trade carried on by these kingdoms with the West and East and the colonising expeditions undertaken by them. Produce not only from Tamilakam (the Tamil country) but also from the surrounding regions were brought to the seaport towns on the Coromandel (Cholamandalam) and Malabar coasts to be shipped largely in their own vessels to Egypt and Babylon. Later on with the Greeks and Romans entering the trade, its volume increased several fold. The whole region functioned as an international emporium and centre of entrepot trade between West and East. As remarked by K.M. de Silva, "Very probably there were trade relations between them (Tamil kingdoms) and Sri Lanka and very probably too the island's trade with the Mediterranean world was through these South Indian ports"<sup>2</sup>. Subsequently, the ports on the Lankan coast also grew in importance such as Mantai and Kadiramalai (Kanterodai). The pre-eminence of Mantai as a great port of antiquity and a veritable supermarket, a mahasanthalai or Mantai for short is well documented. As A. Bertolacci writes, "I suppose that in remote antiquity the coasting trade from one half of Asia to the other half must have passed through the Straits of Mannar and consequently a great emporium was formed on the coast of Ceylon opposite to it"<sup>3</sup>. Again as observed by Casie Chitty, "There can be no doubt, the commercial intercourse of the Greeks and Romans with Ceylon was confined to the North and North-western Parts"<sup>4</sup>.

In those early days, it was trade which led to some Tamil settlements and political conquest, as we have seen. The Pandyan kingdom was the most powerful of the three Tamil kingdoms during the earliest period. As mentioned by Bishop Caldwell it seems at least certain that it was the belief of the earliest settlers in the island that the Pandyan kingdom was in existence before the arrival in Lanka of the historical Vijaya and his band of adventurers. It is most probable then that the earliest Tamil conquests of Lanka referred to by S.Pathmanathan must have been undertaken by merchant princes from Pandya. So too the tradition mentioned by B.C.Law of how a leader of sea-going Indian merchants figured ultimately as the first monarch of Lanka and founder of the first ruling dynasty. Such a leader could have come only from the Tamil kingdoms. Hence our supposition that Vijaya too came from the Coromandel Coast and was a merchant prince. The vain attempt in the Mahavamsa to give him a north Indian ancestry goes against all the known historical facts. As the Yalpana Vaipava Malai records, "He (Vijaya Raja) was a staunch worshipper of Siva and began his reign by dedicating his city to that God and building four Siva Alayams as a protection for the four quarters of his infant kingdom"<sup>5</sup>. As

Brito further remarks, "the religion of Vijaya and his companions was Saivism and Saivism continued to be the religion of the Island for no inconsiderable time".

It makes sense too that Vijaya having established his kingdom should seek the hand of the princess from Pandya. Though we have the authority only of the Mahavamsa that Vijaya's second wife was a princess from southern Mathurai, this is most plausible if Vijaya's antecedents were that of a merchant prince from that region. The further fact that he was a Hindu and probably conversed in Tamil would have ensured that his request for the hand of the Pandyan princess would have been more than favourably received. This would suggest an Indo-Dravidian, if not a Pandyan ancestry for him. Equally, the fact that he had the most cordial relations with the Pandyan kingdom during his long reign of thirty-eight years, would also testify to this. Such a communication could not have failed to lead to a continual influx of Tamils from the mainland in his and the succeeding reigns. As Vijaya Raja had no issue by his Pandyan wife, we have seen that two of his successors on the throne had the appellation "Pandu" in their names signifying Pandyan origins. Hence the first dynasty on the Lankan throne at Anuradhapura was indeed a Pandyan or Indo-Dravidian dynasty, Tamil and Hindu at that. There is no doubt that the kings from Vijaya to Mutusiva were Hindus before the advent of Buddhism. Again, it was the successors of Vijaya who brought the technology associated with the dry-zone tank civilisation to the kingdom established by him. In the words of Sir Emerson Tennent, " It was the Hindu Kings who succeeded Vijaya, that Ceylon was indebted for the earliest knowledge of agriculture, for the construction of reservoirs and the practice of irrigation for the cultivation of rice".(p 436 "Ceylon").

As for relations between the Chola kingdom and Lanka, the most significant event was the capture of the Anuradhapura throne by Elalan ( Elara ), a prince of the Chola dynasty and his rule for a period of forty-four years (145-101 BC). We have dealt with this in detail in the previous chapter. There were other Chola kings who left their mark on Lankan history during the early period after Elalan. According to C. Rasanayagam, it was Karikala Cholan (75-100 AD), the greatest of the early Chola kings who in the first century AD invaded Lanka and carried away a large number of captives to work on the banks of the River Kaviri. Incidentally, Karikala Cholan is credited with irrigation works, the most famous being the Grand Anicut ( Kallannai ). This barrage built across the River Kaviri in the second century AD by the King is an engineering marvel and can

be seen even today. During his invasion of Lanka, he is credited with the destruction of the iron fort at Mantai, as he earned the sobriquet of "destroyer of the hanging fort" from several Sangam poets. It is after this event that the Chola king received the title of "Chembiyam". As Lanka was also known as Tamraparni, the word Tamra is equivalent to chembu (meaning copper in Tamil), the destroyer of Tamraparni is entitled in all likelihood to be called Chembiyam.

As late as the second century AD, there is a reference to the Naga kingdom in northern Lanka in the account of the Chola King Killi Valavan and his love marriage with Pili Valai, the beautiful daughter of Valai Vanan, the Naga king of Mani-pallavam or Naganadu (Nagadipa). This is referred to in the Tamil epic Manimekalai thus:

வெஞ்றிவேற் கிளிக்கு நாகநாடான் வோன்  
ரண மகன் பீலிவனை தான்பயந்த  
புளிற்றிலாங்குழுவி.

(The tender infant which Pilivalai, the daughter of the ruler of Naganadu bore to Killi Chola, who wields the victorious lance).

This also points to the fusion of the Nagas with the Tamils even as early as the first or second century AD. The loss of his son on his return voyage so grieved the Chola King (the father) that he neglected to perform the annual festival in honour of Lord Indra, bringing about the destruction of his capital of Kavirippaddinam by inundation. This Killi Valavan was afterwards found washed ashore. He came to the throne in 105 AD and his brother Perunakilli succeeded him and reigned till 150 AD. A king called Kokilli is also said to have married a Naga princess from northern Lanka. Whether Ilantirayan was the son of Killi Valavan or Kokilli, one thing is certain viz that he was the son of a Killi ( Chola king ) by a Naga princess of Mani-pallavam. It is noteworthy that Thondaiman Ilantirayan was the first king of Thondaimandalam, which was created by separating it from Cholamandalam by his father and given to him. Kanchi or Kanchipuram was its capital. It seems clear from this that the Naga kingdom in northern Lanka continued to exist up to the middle of the third century AD. Its capital was Kadirimalai ( Kanterodai ) in Jaffna and its port Mantai ( Matota ). In those places, there are piles of ruins yet to be excavated; and in Kanterodai a number of Indian and Roman coins have been picked up even on the surface of the soil. A further significant fact to emerge from the above account were the marriages of Naga princesses with Chola princes. Thondaimandalam which became a separate kingdom in 150 or 175 AD, later became the seat of Pallava power. Ilantirayan is believed to be the progenitor of

the Pallavas. In all probability, according to C.Rasanayagam, the name Pallava was derived from Mani-pallavam, the native place of Thondaiman Ilantirayan's mother.

A further celebrated person who left a permanent mark on the island was the Chola prince Kulakoddan. The well known rock inscription found at the entrance to Fort Frederick, Trincomalee establishes beyond any doubt Kulakoddan's presence there and his noble mission. References in the Konesar Kalvettu and the Yalpana Vaipava Malai give details of the arrival of Kulakoddan, son of the illustrious King Manunithicholan on a pilgrimage. His name was Chola Kankan. His advent is believed to have taken place during the reign of King Pandu ( one of the Pandyas ) who ruled at Anuradhapura from 434 to 439 AD. Arriving at Tirukoneswaram in Tirukonamalai, he sees the temple in poor repair and dilapidation. He engages himself in the noble task of re-building the temple of Tiru Koneswara Nather; in order to ensure that a definite income would accrue for the maintenance of the temple he builds the Kantalai Tank for agricultural development and settles Vanniyars in large tracts of land for the temple's upkeep. According to S.Arumugam, "He thus fulfils his task and earns for himself the title of Kulakoddan--builder of Tank and Temple--by which name posterity reveres him today"<sup>7</sup>. His significant contribution was also the induction of Vanniyars to the island. The Vanniyars were noted agriculturists on the Indian mainland. It is said that a band of fifty-seven families initially came from the Chola country and their numbers rapidly increased. Seven chieftains emerged amongst them, to serve as their leaders and the seven districts became known as the Vanni country. The Vanni country, at one time about three-thousand square miles, stretched from the Trincomalee and Mannar areas northwards, from the fifth century AD onwards.

The relations between the Chera ( Cera ) kingdom and Lanka took place during the reign of Cheran Senguttuvan and Gaja Bahu I of Lanka (171-193 AD). Gaja Bahu was present at the consecration of the first temple built for the worship of Pattini-kadavul ( Kannaki ) by Senguttuvan at the latter's invitation. On his return from India, Gaja Bahu introduced this cult to the island under the name of Pattini Deviyo. There is evidence of this in the Tamil epic of the age--the Silappadikaram of the second century AD, which relates the Story of the Anklet. The Sinhalese poem "Gajabakathawa" recites these incidents too in flowery language. Gaja Bahu brought back from India the golden halamba or anklet copies of which are symbols of Pattini worship. Oaths were not infrequently

taken on them and in the courts of justice too. The Pattini cult is even today among the most prevalent of the folk cults of the Sinhalese. Many festivals and sacrifices accompanied with rituals began to be performed in honour of this goddess. Thus Gaja Bahu also established the great game of Ankeliya or horse-pulling held especially on occasions of an epidemic disease. It concludes with a torch lighting procession through infected villages.

During his reign, Gaja Bahu also invaded India and brought back not only the twelve-thousand Sinhalese prisoners taken earlier, but also an equal number of Tamil prisoners whom he settled in the Alutkuru Korale of the Colombo district, Harispattu and Tumpane of the Kandy district and in parts of the Kurunegala district. In honour of his triumph, he ordered a Perahera (procession) to be celebrated every year in Anuradhapura and this was the beginning of the annual procession which is now best seen in Kandy. At this festival, even today a high place is accorded to the Goddess Pattini, whose worship was introduced by Gaja Bahu. According to C.S. Navaratnam, "Though Pattini was a deified Hindu, her worship has been introduced into Buddhist Ceylon and her cult is more popular and alive in this island than in her own country India".

In the second half of the Anuradhapura period, which corresponded to the period of Pallava ascendancy in South India, Pallava cultural influences were felt in Lanka. The Pallava period is important for it represents the impact of Aryan influences on Dravidian culture. It was again during this period too that the civilization of the Tamils spread to distant lands of south-east Asia. Under the Pallavas, Astronomy, Philosophy, Music, Art and Literature flourished. The Pallava kings fostered the spread of Sanskrit learning. The Bakti movement, a fervid emotional surrender to God, found expression in the Bhagavata Purana and the Thevaram Hymns of the Saivite and Vaishnavite Saints. The Vedic gods were relegated to the background and the worship of the pre-Vedic deities Siva and Vishnu became popular. Once again, Hinduism became the living faith of South India and as a result, Jainism and Buddhism gradually disappeared from the Tamil country.

All these changes in South India had their repercussions on the history of the island. It also had its effect on the religious situation of the country especially as viewed from a Buddhist standpoint, but more of that in a later chapter. Here we will look at the cultural impact arising from the close relations between the Sinhalese kings and the Pallavas. The cordiality in the relations between the

Pallavas and the Sinhalese Court and the activities of mercantile bodies and religious groups of South Indian affiliations led to the spread of ideas and techniques characteristic of Pallava traditions. King Manavamma (Manavarman) who ruled over Lanka (648-718 AD) had spent several years in the Court of the Pallava king before he assumed his rule. During his reign, he spared no effort as well in encouraging cultural contacts between the two countries. Pallava artisans and craftsmen helped and guided the architectural and artistic activities of Lanka. Several examples of Pallava architecture and sculpture are extant today in Lanka. The Nalanda Gedige, the earliest monument of Lanka which was entirely of stone construction was modelled entirely on Pallava architectural forms. The figure of 'Man and Horse', lately identified as a representative of Aiyanar, considered as a deity presiding over tanks and lakes and the bas relief representing Siva and Parvati at Isurumuniya bear a close resemblance to the figures at Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram) in Tamil Nadu. They suggest that they are the work of craftsmen trained in the Pallava school of art. The latter figures of "man and woman" often misrepresented as the Isurumuniya Lovers indicate divine figures not humans. This is clear from the "sacred thread" worn on the left shoulder of the male figure, the "Tiruvasi" or the sacred halo, the emblem of divinity behind him and the divine expression of the woman. Carved also on the Isurumuniya Rock in Pallava style is a group of elephants emerging out from a cleft in a rock. The dvarapala figures (guardstones) at Tiriay and the bodhisattva figures at Situlpavva and Kurukkalmatam also seem to be of Pallava inspiration. The Pallava-Grantha characters originally used in the Pallava kingdom for writing Sanskrit texts were also introduced to the island. The Kuccuveli Sanskrit inscription unearthed in the Trincomalee district is in the Grantha script of the old Pallava style.

Of historical and cultural interest is the Tiriay rock inscription in the vicinity of Trincomalee. This inscription bears out the cordial relations between the Pallava and Sinhalese kings. Narasinhavarman I, the Pallava king (630-668 AD) and Manavamma (648-718 AD) were friends and allies and each with the help of the other triumphed over his rival to the throne of Pallava and Lanka respectively as narrated in the Mahavamsa. According to K.A.Nilakanta Sastri, when the Pallava capital faced renewed attacks from the Chalukiyas, on the second occasion, Narasinhavarman was assisted by the refugee Sinhala prince Manavamma. Subsequently he led two naval expeditions against Lanka on behalf of Manavamma before the latter regained his throne. During this period of Pallava ascendancy in South India, it is also evident that the armies raised by

Sinhala kings came from Pallava. After these battles, many of them must have settled in the island. There are traces even now of the Pallava occupation of certain areas in the north of the island. According to S. Rajanayagam, in the place name Pallavarayankattu, a division of the Punakari district, in the worship of Potharayer, a title by which Pallava kings were known and in the existence of such families as Nolambarayar, a Pallava offshoot of the Nolambas of Dharmapuri are seen clearly evidence of Pallava occupation and settlement of the region during this period.

In South India, the decline of the Pallavas saw the rise in succession of the Pandyas followed by the Cholas. The period also witnessed the continued resurgence of Hinduism under the crusading influence of the Nayanmar and Alvar saints. The Pandya and Chola powers became militantly Hindu in religious outlook and were quite intent on eliminating Buddhist and Jaina influence in South India. In time, South Indian Buddhism was all but wiped out and as a result one important religio-cultural link between South India and Lanka was severed. An important consequence of this was that the Tamils in Lanka became increasingly conscious of their ethnicity which they sought to assert in terms of culture and religion, Dravidian / Tamil and Hindu. Thus the Tamil settlements in the island became sources of support for the Tamil invaders; the Tamil mercenaries with the Sinhala kings a veritable fifth column. According to K.M.de Silva, Lanka from being a multi-ethnic polity became a plural society in which two distinct groups lived side by side. Nevertheless there were long periods of social harmony between the Tamils and Sinhalese and strong cultural and religious ties. Again, there was no ethnic purity, least of all among the kings and queens of Lanka and the princes and princesses of its ruling classes.

A significant development which followed was that the Sinhala kingdom became increasingly embroiled in the wars between the Tamil kingdoms. By the middle of the ninth century, the Pandyas had prevailed over their Pallava rivals and set about settling scores with the latter's allies, the Sinhala kingdom. The Pandyan expansion continued under Varaguna's son and successor Sri Mara Srivallabha (815-862) who invaded Lanka under Sena I (831-851) and sacked his capital. The Pandyan imposed an indemnity as the price of their withdrawal. The Pallava king, Nandivarman III (846-869) formed alliances with the Gangas, Cholas and even the Sinhalas and created a confederacy to curtail the overgrown Pandya power. About the same time, Sena II (851-885) of Lanka led an

expedition against the Pandyan ruler in 862, sacked Mathurai and enthroned Varagunavarman II, perhaps the prince who invoked his aid.

In the last quarter of the ninth century, the Cholas emerged as a formidable power. They soon absorbed the Pallavas and proceeded to Pandyan territory. Confronted with the prospect of Chola hegemony, the Sinhala kingdom, in a reversal of policy threw its weight behind the Pandyas. A Sinhala army was sent to aid the Pandyan ruler Rajasimha II in 915 but to no avail. The Pandyan king fled to Lanka with his regalia. There were thus compelling reasons for the Chola advance on Lanka which became a threat to its southern frontier. As K.M.de Silva observed, "In short the consolidation of Chola power in the Pandyan kingdom was incomplete as long as Sri Lanka remained independent". Rajaraja the Great (983-1014) thus brought the Sinhala kingdom under his direct rule. The Sinhala kingdom became a province or mandalam of the Chola empire. Mihindu V was the last Sinhalese king to rule from Anuradhapura. He was captured by the Cholas in 1017 and died in captivity in South India. Rajaraja's son Rajendra completed the conquest of the island. The southern parts of the island slipped out of the control of the Cholas but Rajarata ( the north-central kingdom ) continued to be ruled by them for nearly eight decades from Polonnaruwa. A significant move by the Cholas was to shift the capital from Anuradhapura to Polonnaruwa. This was a change dictated by considerations of security. As the main threat to the Cholas came from Ruhana in the south of the island, Polannaruwa was better placed to guard against attacks from that region.



## CHAPTER XII

### TAMIL SETTLEMENTS AND TAMIL-SINHALA IDENTITIES

The ancestors of the vast majority of the Sri Lankans of today are of Indian origin. Almost all of them seem to have come from the southern parts of India. The population of Lanka in ancient times was made up of Dravidian settlers. As we have seen, the attempts to give the first recorded settlers an Indo-Aryan ancestry have gone against all the known historical facts. There have been no subsequent migration or colonisation and settlement by tribes from northern India. Lanka attracted to its shores all sorts of people from South India—adventurers in quest of land and wealth, merchants and traders, seamen and divers, agriculturists and artisans, warriors and mercenaries mainly from the Coromandel (Cholamandalam) and Malabar Coasts. Periodic migrations of these peoples from South India resulted in the growth of settlements in different localities of the island.

We have seen how tribes moved from South India to the island from a remote period of time bringing with them their arts, crafts and culture. Prehistoric archaeological remains indicate that the neolithic stage of civilization spread to the island from South India. S.Paranavitana explicitly stated that the megalithic monuments and urn burials belong to the Dravidian speaking people. This is supported by evidence from literary sources. The major communities in prehistoric Lanka, according to archaeological, traditional and literary evidence were the Rakshasas, the Yakshas ( Yakkas ) and the Nagas, all of whom entered the island from South India. After the disintergration of the Rakshasa kingdom of Ravana following a deluge, many petty kingdoms and chieftaincies would have appeared. At the dawn of history, the Yakshas were in occupation of the north-central region and were numerous in the south and southern and eastern coasts. The Nagas had established kingdoms in the north ( Nagadipa ) and the west ( Kalyani ) of the island from prehistoric times long before the sixth century BC. The affinities which the Yakshas and Nagas had with the Tamils and other Dravidian groups show them as the lineal descendants in culture as well in physique of the early or proto-Dravidian tribes of India.

The earliest Tamil settlements, as we have seen, were predominantly the agricultural settlements in the north-west and south-east and the trading settlements around the seaport towns on the north and north-western coasts of the island and around Tirukonamalai ( Trincomalee ) on the eastern coast. The agricultural settlements are attested to by the discovery of monuments and artefacts described as megalithic found in these areas. The trading settlements are attested to by the presence of the five "Isvarams" dedicated to Lord Siva whose devotees the Hindus were Tamils. As observed by Paul. E.Peiris, they were a wealthy mercantile population. From very early times, trade has been of considerable importance, bringing prosperity to these regions. The Tamil people from the Malabar and Coromandel coasts had a commercial intercourse with parts of north and north-western Lanka, which were the developed and civilised parts of the country. Many came and settled down at these ports. As proof of these settlements and the prosperity of the region are the existence of a large number of ruins along the western coast northwards from Muneeswaram ( in Chilaw ) to Kanterodai ( in Jaffna ). The dilapidated temples and the tanks in ruins at these places together with the Tamil place names given to them prove beyond doubt that the people who occupied these areas were originally Tamils. So too did the Tamils occupy the areas around Tirukonamalai and Tamblagam (Tampalagamam ) as well as Tirukovil on the east coast. The ancient Hindu temples in these places not only testify to their antiquity but also to the presence there of Tamils from very early times. For instance, Tirukovil in the Batticoloa district is traditionally claimed to be one of the temples of Ravana.

It is on record that about a thousand years before the Christian era, the ships of King Solomon called at the ports of South India and Lanka. The ships came to Tarshish and carried away gold, elgum trees and precious stones from Ophir. C.Rasanayagam identifies Ophir with Oviyar, a tribe of Nagas around Mantai and Tarshish with Tiruketeeswaram. Much later the Greeks and Romans from the West and the Chinese, Javanese and Burmese from the East were all engaged in this trade. In the words of Cosmas, a Greek Egyptian monk, "Sielideba (Ceylon) being placed in the middle as it were of India, received goods from all nations and distributed them, thus becoming a great emporium"<sup>1</sup>. He went on to say, "There were two kings ruling at opposite ends of the Island one of whom possesses the hyacinth and the other the district in which are the port and emporium, for the emporium in that place is the greatest in those parts"<sup>2</sup>. E.Tennent, commenting later on, on this passage, says that "the king in whose

Pliny, the Roman writer describes it thus, "There were five-hundred towns in the island of which the chief was Palaisimunda, the residence of the king with a population of two-hundred thousand souls"<sup>4</sup>. Though Pliny's reference to Palaisimunda as a town was erroneous, there is no doubt as to the prosperity and wealth of the towns in the region and to the size of the population in Palaisimunda or Palaya Elamandalam. Large numbers of Tamil traders and merchants must have settled down in these parts to take advantage of the trade. More so, as the Nagas seem to have acquired a name for being cleverer pirates than traders.

Pearl fishing was a very thriving industry from the earliest times. The population in these centres consisted largely of pearl divers and chank fishers and cutters from the Coromandel Coast. There were two main fisheries, one on the Indian coast and the other on the Lankan coast. According to Megasthenes, the Greek Ambassador to the Court of Chandra Gupta ( writing in the third century BC ) "Lanka was more productive of gold and large pearls than India"<sup>5</sup>. Even before the advent of the historical Vijaya as we have seen, agriculture and paddy cultivation in the north-western parts of the island had reached such a state of importance as to constitute a source of wealth. It is not surprising that the dignity of agriculture was the subject of praise by the poets of ancient Tamilakam. In the Tamil work Cirupanarrupadai, Mantai is referred to as a town surrounded by many tanks of cool waters. The lake Megisba mentioned by Pliny was the Giant's Tank ( Maha-vavi=Tamil ) which served as a reservoir for feeding the hundreds of smaller tanks scattered over the district. This tank was constructed before Vijaya's time. The Report of Captain Schneider, the Colonial Engineer in 1807 states that this tank could feed land sufficient for the production of one million parrahs ( bushels ) of paddy. It is no wonder that large quantities of rice had been exported in those times from here. This again would have supported a large agricultural population. Weaving of cloth was another important industry in the northern parts of the island. Cotton must have been cultivated in large extents in Nagadipa ( Jaffna Peninsula ) and the Vanni. The name Parutti Turai (Cotton Port) given to present day Point Pedro testifies to the export of cotton from this port. The Nagas were skilled in the art of weaving and the cotton stuffs woven by them were bought by Tamil traders for export to foreign countries. According to the Periplus, these muslins by reason of their fineness and transparency were specially sought after by the fashionable ladies of Rome.

The Naga kingdom in the north-west--Nagadipa ( Jaffna Peninsula )--was the seat of a well organized government. It contained cities, towns and villages. The capital, Kadiramalai ( Kanterodai ) and the port, Mantai, were well fortified. As we have seen, the Nagas were a civilised and literate race. They were very akin to the Tamils from South India. Being originally a Dravidian tribe like the Tamils and having entered the island from South India, they were in constant and close communication here as in India in their religion, customs, language and modes of thinking with the Tamils. Hence we see gradually a merging of the two communities, Nagas and Tamils. Chola princes have married Naga princesses as we have seen. We have seen how the Naga royal line from Nagadipa married into the Anuradhapura court and in time the Lambakanna dynasty,a mixed Naga and Tamil dynasty, gaining ascendancy in Anuradhapura.

Though the Nagas began as serpent-worshippers, they were also Siva-lingam worshippers and were closely associated with the Tiruketeeswaram temple. In turn, Hinduism itself was influenced by the serpent cult, as some Hindu deities came to be represented with a protective hood of cobras. Thus the Nagapooshani Amman temple in Nainativu is one of the popular temples in the north. According to C S Navaratnam, "this shrine has traditions that connect it with the ancient Nagas of Nagadipa". Again in their language, the Nagas spoke a dialect called Elu in Lanka and as pointed out earlier, it being basically the Dravidian language was easily understood by the Tamils. As Elu was only a dialect, it was Tamil by now developed and refined from the Dravidian language, that was used by the Nagas of the Royal Court and the elite amongst them. As C.Rasanayagam says, "the Naga kings as well as the Naga people appear to have excelled in Tamil literature. One Mudi Nagarayar of Murunciyar ( a place since engulfed by sea ) was a poet of the second Tamil Sangam established at Kavadarapuram and lived during the time of the Mahabharata War", ( circa 1500 BC ). Several Naga poets graced the Third Sangam (200 BC-300 AD) and the excellent verses composed by them are still extant. The Cirupanarrupadai , a Tamil literary work , was composed by a poet called Nattattanar in praise of the Naga king, Nalliyakodan of Mantai.

As more and more Tamils came over from South India in time, as colonists, traders, seamen, warriors, etc, the Naga identity became absorbed in the Tamils. By the late third century AD, we do not seem to have references anymore to the Naga kingdom in the north and north-west of the island. The population in these regions became essentially Tamil. Naga origin and influence though are yet seen

for instance in Tamil names such as Nagalingam, Naganathan, Nagaratnam, Nagarajah, Nagasunderam, Nageswaran, Nagendra, Nagamuttu, Nagamma, Nageswari, Nagarathi, Nagini etc. The fact that the Nagas were in possession of a very advanced civilization could be inferred from the Tamil words derived from the word Naga such as Nagarikam ( civilization) Nagaram ( town or city ), Nagasinnan ( flute ) etc. The art of painting and sculpture was not foreign to the Nagas. The Tamil word "oviyam" according to C.Rasanayagam appears to be derived from the word "Oviyar", the tribe of Nagas who occupied Mantai. The work of the Oviyar would naturally be called "oviyam". Thus the fusion of the Nagas with the Tamils in the north and north-west of the island has gone to transform those settlements there into wholly Tamil settlements by the fourth and fifth centuries. With subsequent migrations and incursions of Tamils increasing during the later Anuradhapura period, the numbers of Tamils occupying these areas would have considerably increased to mark them out as Tamil regions. Again those who came after the Hindu revival taking place in South India under the Bakti Movement during the sixth to the ninth centuries tended to remain Hindu and Tamil, retaining their separate identity.

On the eastern coast, there were Tamil settlements from a remote past particularly at or around the seaport towns. The most important of these was in Tiruconamalai ( Trincomalee ) where stood the hallowed temple to Lord Isvara (Siva)--the temple of Tirukoneswaram. As we have seen King Ravana from the time of the Ramayana was a worshipper at this temple. He also performed the last funeral rites for his mother at the Kanniya Hot Springs. As mentioned earlier, the Tamils also controlled the pearl fisheries off Tamblegam (Tampalagamam ). Along the coast southwards to Batticoloa, there are many historic Hindu temples dating back to pre-historic times. That there were Hindu temples on the eastern coast in places such as Eravur ( Erakavilla ) in those days only shows the presence of Tamil settlements in those districts as well. Mention has been made of the temple at Tirukovil. As is evident, the name of the place itself is derived from the sacred ( tiru ) temple ( kovil ). Another ancient temple is the one at Amparai of which there is no trace now. According to C.S. Navaratnam, "the Pillar inscription that is at the Amparai Kachcheri reveals the existence of a temple to Siva before 700 AD. Some derive the word Amparai from "Ambal" consort to Siva". The presence of these ancient temples is proof that the religious needs of the people in these Tamil settlements on the east coast had to be met. As late as the fourth century AD, King Mahasena is said to have destroyed some Hindu temples in the East during his reign.

In the early fifth century, when the Pandyas were rulers at Anuradhapura (436 AD), as we have seen, Prince Kulakoddan, a celebrated Chola prince visited Tiruconamalai ( Trincomalee ) and restored the temple of Tirukoneswaram. He built the terraced halls and made the sin-dispelling well ( pavanasm ). His visit was a source of great encouragement to the Hindus. According to the Konesar Kalvettu and the Tirukonesala Puranam, Kulakoddan first got down the Vanniyars as custodians of the temple. He inducted fifty-seven Vanniya families from Chola-nadu and settled them on large tracts of land. He built the Kantalai tank as well. According to S Arumugam, "He thus fulfilled his task and became immortal, winning the title of Kulakoddan--builder of tank and temple, by which name posterity reveres him today". The Vanniyars were noted agriculturists and they took charge in opening up the lands for cultivation for the benefit of the temple and themselves. Their numbers increased and from the descendants of these Vanniyars came later the chieftains of the different principalities of the Vanni districts. Thus from the fifth century AD, this vast region from Trincomalee to Mannar and stretching northwards became the Vanni region of today. The fact that the Tamils here gave their caste name (Vanniyars) to these districts ( Vanni ), which they occupied points to their early colonisation and settlement of these areas in large numbers.

As the Tamils came to occupy the northern and eastern parts of the country, a similar process was going on in the rest of the country leading to the emergence of a Sinhala polity. The recorded history of Lanka relates that Vijaya's marriage to a Pandyan princess led to the arrival not only of wives for his seven-hundred companions but also a thousand families from the eighteen guilds from the Tamil kingdom of Pandya. These artisans no doubt helped Vijaya build his capital city--Tamana Nuwara--in Tambapanni. Under Vijaya's successors, as we have seen, "Tamil colonies of agriculturists and artificers were imported in large numbers and rice and other cultivation introduced. Irrigation works were constructed" ( P. Arunachalam ). When during the reign of Pandukabhaya, the capital was shifted to Anuradhapura, a new city and many tanks were built. It is also significant to note that the earliest tanks built around Anuradhapura had only Tamil names such as Pavatkulam, Pandarakulam, Pandankulam etc and the guardians of these tanks were Hindu deities. In time a fusion of the Tamils settling down in and around Anuradhapura with the Yakshas and Nagas was taking place. The Yakshas who during the early period were given positions of power and trust ( as during the time of Pandukabhaya ), found that they were

being relegated to the lower grades of society. Those that lived in the interior of the country and remained outside the pale of civilization and the emerging polity became the Veddahs--the aboriginal people of Lanka ( C. Rasanayagam ). There are however others who believe that the Veddahs are Vedoid and Austroloid peoples who pre-dated the coming of the proto-Dravidians to the island but that need not concern us here. The Nagas on the other hand, through their matrimonial alliances with the Anuradhapura Court began to increase their influence. The high grades of society came to be consequently composed of Tamils and Nagas who by their fusion became the ruling and agricultural classes at Anuradhapura. It may be noted that already by two or three centuries before the Christian era, there were wealthy and influential Tamils in the region. The Naga kingdoms in the north and west as we have seen established alliances with the Anuradhapura dynasty. Starting with Maha Naga, the brother of Devanampiya Tissa, Naga connections became rather common, culminating in the Lambakkans--a mixed Tamil and Naga dynasty gaining ascendancy to the Anuradhapura throne. So powerful were they that they alternated with the Moriya clan on the throne of Anuradhapura. It is therefore not difficult to visualise that the conditions which existed during this period paved the way for the fusion of the Yakshas, Nagas and Tamils in a melting pot which gave rise to the emerging Sinhala polity. The bonding element at this stage was religion viz Buddhism, for as we have seen Buddhism became a pervasive influence amongst the people and many became converts to the new faith. Thus began a long process which involved the Buddhification and Sinhalisation of the originally Dravidian speaking peoples in the north-central region known as Rajarata. As said earlier, the term Sinhala came into currency in the 5th-6th centuries only and the beginnings of Sinhala group consciousness can be said to date from that time onwards.

Elsewhere too in the island, particularly in Kalyani ( Kelaniya ) and Magama ( Ruhuna ), the other centres of power, it was seen that the early settlements were Naga in Kalyani and Tamil in Magama. Kathirgamam ( Kataragama ) in the second century BC was the seat of a royal dynasty which has left cave inscriptions at Bovattagoda ( Batticoloa district ) and at Kotadumuhela ( Hambantota district ). Its inscriptions carry the symbol of the fish. No royal dynasty at this period had the fish emblem except the Pandyas. It is probable that a branch of the Pandyan royal family ruled over South-East Lanka from Kathirgamam. According to C.S. Navaratnam, the presence of many Tamil terms and the antiquity of the Murugan cult go to suggest Tamil settlements here

from an early period. Again as is well known, latterly the sea-faring people who occupied the southern and western coasts of Lanka were originally Tamils. There are many Tamil names or Tamil combinations for many coastal towns and villages. As John D. Rogers (quoting Roberts 1982) observes, "Three important Sinhala castes, the Karava, Salagama, and Durava were largely the product of emigration from south India that took place between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries; the arrival and reconstruction of these groups fundamentally changed the 'caste system' in the low country". New light has also been thrown on the caste system with the publication of the third book of the Portuguese Thombu. According to Dr H.W.Thambiah, "The names and the castes and their personal names point to a South Indian origin"<sup>10</sup>. As H.W.Codrington, the historian says, "We may note that at the present day, two of the most important castes in the Sinhalese Low Country are undoubtedly Tamil or at least of South Indian descent"<sup>11</sup>. Though this is anticipating developments of a later period, it shows that the Sinhalisation of the Dravidian peoples had continued into our times.

From the fifth and sixth centuries onwards, the Tamils were becoming the predominant settlers in the North and East of the island. As we have seen, in the north and north-west the Nagas were being absorbed by the Tamils. In the Mannar district, the place names that have survived were purely Tamil as there were Tamil settlements from the very beginning. In the Jaffna Peninsula though, we see traces of the indigenous language of Elu, the dialect of the Nagas surviving in some place names. Some have mistaken this to assert that the early settlers in the Jaffna Peninsula were Sinhalese. The reason for this confusion as C.S. Navaratnam explains is that as the old Sinhala language also grew out of Elu and Tamil, some place names in Jaffna appear to have a Sinhala sounding. As has been shown, it is quite clear that at that early period of time, the Jaffna peninsula was only occupied by Nagas and Tamils; a Sinhala identity was yet to emerge. And so it is with the Buddhist ruins found in Kanterodai and other places in the north and east. They only testify to the fact that there were Tamil Buddhists living in these areas. In the Vanni districts, as we have seen, the Vanni Tamils were in occupation of them. In the East, some of the Yakshas were being absorbed by the Tamils. Those Tamils in the maritime districts of the South and West as well as in the north-central region comprising the Anuradhapura kingdom were being absorbed into the emerging Sinhala polity. Traces of Tamil place names though continued to survive in those districts.

The process of the formation of the Sinhala race by the fusion of the Yakshas, Nagas and Tamils continued with the process on the Tamil side of their occupation of the north and east of the island and their absorption of the Nagas and the Yakshas. Hence as some historians and ethnologists have stated what was evident in these processes is the fact that both Tamil and Sinhala identities in the island stemmed from a common ethnic stratum. As S.Paranavitana observed, "the vast majority of the people who today speak Tamil or Sinhala must ultimately be descended from those authochthonous people"<sup>12</sup>. (Nagas, Yakshas and Tamils). The only difference was that the melting pot of Yakshas, Nagas and Tamils led to the emergence of a new race of people calling themselves Sinhala in course of time. As for the Tamils, they were already a separate identity and retained that identity, though they absorbed the Nagas and Yakshas as well. Though there was a natural increase in the population, it was also augmented through waves of Tamil migrants who came during this period as soldiers and mercenaries as well as peaceful settlers and colonists. Depending on where they settled down in the island, they were either absorbed into the emerging Sinhala polity or retained their separate Tamil identity. The emergence of a Sinhala ethnicity and its early growth as is well known, was largely through a process of Sinhalisation of categories of peoples from Yakshas, Nagas and Tamils. As Dr Mendis observed, in the centuries before and after the Christian era the Dravidians helped to form the Sinhala race. This development as we have shown continued right into our times. As Dr S. Bandaranayake puts it, "Even in recent times we have evidence of the entry and absorption of various groups and communities, both migrant and indigenous, and a variety of cultural elements into the changing and evolving character of the Sinhala speaking people and the culture associated with them. There is no doubt that the Tamil contribution to this has been of considerable importance throughout history,..."<sup>13</sup>...

With the spread of Buddhism and the growth of the Sinhala language, there occurred a religio-linguistic division of the people of Lanka into those who remained Hindu-Tamil and the emergent Buddhists speaking the Sinhala language. This development can be discerned from various sources: Firstly, there is no evidence whatsoever of the Sinhalese as a people in the centuries before and immediately after the Christian era. The term Sinhala was not mentioned in the Brahmi inscriptions, the earliest recorded evidence of the island. As pointed out, the term first came into currency only in the 4-5<sup>th</sup> centuries. As observed by R.A.L.H. Gunawardene, it was a long process with

initially perhaps the king and the ruling elite calling themselves Sinhala. This was gradually extended to the others. Secondly , there was again no evidence of Sinhala as a language before the introduction of Buddhism in 247 BC. The language itself gradually grew taking over a thousand years before it became a vehicle of literary thought. Also, the identification of the linguistic grouping with the Sinhala grouping was a lengthy development. Thirdly, the Sinhala Buddhists , in the practice of Buddhism, have not quite succeeded in freeing themselves from their Hindu past. They continue to worship the Hindu deities (although Buddha revolted against the worship of gods and Buddhism was opposed to worship of images). Fourthly, the caste system, the central feature of Hindu-Tamil society, prevails among the Sihala-Buddhists, although Buddhism is opposed to caste. This again is a vestige of its Hindu-Tamil past. These taken together with the archaeological, epigraphical and historical evidence mentioned earlier, lead one to the irresistible conclusion that the Sinhalas emerged as a result of the ascriptive cleavage consequent upon the spread of Buddhism and the Sinhala language. Thus Buddhism and the Sinhala language formed the constitutive elements in the emergence of the Sinhala polity. Hence we will examine these elements in greater detail in the next two chapters.



## CHAPTER XIII

### RELIGION AND ETHNICITY

As we have seen from the previous chapter, Tamil and Sinhala identities stemmed from a common ethnic stratum. Furthermore, as K M de Silva observes, "Ethnicity was not an important point of division in society in Sri Lanka in this period and it would seem that neither the Sinhalese nor the Tamils remained racially pure". As a matter of fact, the physical characteristics are more similar than dissimilar in the two ethnic groups. To a foreign person, if not a local one, the identification of one from the other on appearance alone is not an easy matter. The differences between the Tamils and the Sinhalese today are more seen in their respective cultures and ways of life. Underlying such cultural differences, one may say, are religion and language. While the Tamils are mainly Hindu and speak Tamil, the Sinhalese are mainly Buddhist and speak Sinhala. As the theory of an Indo-Aryan ancestry for the Sinhalese cannot be sustained on the basis of known historical facts, attempts at differentiation between the two ethnic groups are based on religion and language.

In the early period of Lankan history with which we are concerned here, even such differences were blurred and certainly not points of division in society. As Dr. P. Raghupathy remarks, "Sinhala and Tamil identities stemmed from a common cultural stratum in the distant past".<sup>2</sup> The common basis of their respective cultures in the early period made for religious accommodation and tolerance. The Mahavamsa's overall view of seeing relations between the Tamil Hindus and the Sinhala Buddhists during this period as one only of strife and conflict appears to be certainly not consistent with the reality. The religious harmony that prevailed in the country even after the advent of Buddhism to the island in the early period of Lankan history is more noteworthy than the isolated incidents which have been recorded of religious conflict.

Before the official coming of Buddhism to the island in the reign of King Devanampiya Tissa (247-207 BC), Hinduism was the religion of the kings and the people. There were beliefs in animism, demonology etc needless to say among the Yakshas and Nagas, but as B C Law observed "the ascetic God Siva had a great hold on the people".<sup>3</sup> Buddhism was first introduced to South India

along with Jainism, before its official coming to Lanka. As mentioned earlier both religions were received with open arms as systems of thought in South India and flourished side by side with Hinduism. There were Buddhist centres of learning such as in Kanchi and many followers of Buddhism among the Tamils. Some cities and towns had Buddhist viharas to cater to their needs. As we have seen, there were many learned Tamil Buddhist monks who contributed to the spread of Buddhism. The kings of the time looked upon them as different sects and treated all of them alike. They encouraged religious discourses and open discussions. Thus Buddhism was prevalent among the Tamils during this period in the Tamil country.

When Buddhism was introduced to the island, it was again accepted by wide sections of the community. While the new faith claimed many converts amongst the king's subjects, there were converts amongst the Yakshas and Nagas as well. We have seen the reception accorded by these peoples to the arrival of the Sacred Bodhi ( Bo-tree ). People lined the streets to welcome the sapling of the Bo-tree. In the same way, there were many Tamils living in the island who also became converts to the new faith. The Tamil householder's terrace inscription from Anuradhapura which records the construction of a Buddhist monument, mentions the names of six Tamils, one of whom was a ship captain. From the adoption of Prakrit names by these Tamils, it may be inferred that a section of the Tamils came under the influence of Buddhism ( S.Paranavitana ). Again, much later, as K.M.de Silva commenting on the Duthagamani-Elara war pointed out, there were Tamil Buddhists on Duthagamini's side.

Buddhism too spread to Nagadipa ( Jaffna Peninsula ) and the outlying islands as some of the Nagas became converts to the new faith. Thus viharas and monasteries came to be established there as well. The Tamil epic "Manimekalai" is specially valuable as a record of the extent to which Buddhism had spread in South India and Lanka in the early part of the second century AD. Its value is enhanced by the fact that it is much older than the Pali Chronicles--the Dipavamsa and the Mahavamsa. In the epic, the heroine Manimekalai visits the island of Manipallavam which is identified with Nagadipa as a centre of Buddhist worship. Similarly Karadipa ( Karativu ) and Kadiramalai ( Kanterodai ) are mentioned in ancient books as places of Buddhist worship. The discovery of Buddhist remains in Kanterodai is further evidence of this. As P.Raghupathy points out the Buddhist remains of Jaffna are unique in their concept and execution. At Kanterodai, they are found in a cluster in a particular

spot. "They seem to be burial monuments of monks, a buddhised version of megalithism. Such a concept in architecture and its execution in coral and limestone significantly differentiate the Jaffna monuments from those in the rest of the island" <sup>4</sup>. Sinhala writers very often assume that all Buddhists in ancient times were Sinhalese, which was certainly not the case. The inscriptions from very ancient times and the literary works from the first century AD prove that Buddhism made strong inroads among the Tamil people both in South India and Lanka.

Again, religious institutions, Buddhist and Hindu, were set up by rulers and peoples in different parts of the country during the early centuries before and after the Christian era. As we have seen, some Tamil kings patronised Buddhism and contributed to the construction of Buddhist monuments. Tamil rulers like Elalan though a Hindu were liberal in their religious outlook and supported all faiths including Buddhism. The Mahavamsa itself states that Elara was a pious and just king and had patronized Buddhism, though a non-buddhist. It may be pointed out here that Emperor Asoka, though he favoured Buddhism, respected all sects and adopted a policy of respect and freedom for all. As K.M. Panikkar explains, Asoka's own name of adoption is " Devanam Priya ", meaning "beloved of the gods". Which gods? Surely the gods of the Hindu religion. In K.M.Panikkar's words, "The distinction between Hinduism and Buddhism was purely sectarian..... The exclusiveness of religious doctrines is a Semitic conception which was unknown to India for a long time" <sup>5</sup>.

Such was the position in Lanka as well during this period. As observed by K.M.de Silva, "(Sinhala) kings who patronised Buddhism, the official religion, supported Hindu temples and observed Brahmanic practices as well. Hinduism was sustained also by small groups of Brahmins living among the people and at Court" <sup>6</sup>. And as observed by S. Pathmanathan, it was never claimed that the religion of the ruler should be the religion of the people. Furthermore, even a zealous Buddhist ruler could worship Hindu deities and support Hindu institutions. Some Lankan rulers during this period are known to have supported the construction of Hindu temples. Duthagamani is on record as having rebuilt the temple of Lord Skanda at Kataragama. As we have seen, Gaja Bahu was responsible for the introduction of the worship of Kannaki under the name of Pattini Deviyo. The only recorded instance of intolerance in the early period was the destruction of Hindu temples on the eastern coast by King Mahasena (334-

362 AD) but this did not deter the Hindus there in following their traditional faith.

Again, although Buddhism became the prevailing religion in the island from the third century BC, it did not prevent the people from worshipping some of the Hindu gods and goddesses they were accustomed to. The God of Kartirgamam (Kataragama) was known by the name of Velan, Murugan, Kandan, Kumaran etc and was the most popular God. Many villages had a shrine to him and festivals were conducted in his name. It may thus be observed that there was a spirit of tolerance which prevailed during those early times. Ethnicity was not an issue nor was it in the fore. In otherwords, there was no ethnic divide on religious grounds. Hinduism and Buddhism were seen merely as different sects and were espoused by kings and practised by the people. Neither were they regarded as mutually exclusive.

However, the ancient Chronicles, the Dipavamsa and the Mahavamsa, far from narrating a political history were principally an ecclesiastical history intended to glorify the establishment of Buddhism in the island. This theme, as we have seen, has been embellished therefore with many historical myths. The introduction of Buddhism to the island is also preceded by such myths. The expulsion of the Yakshas by the Buddha on a previous mythical visit to the island to secure the place for his religion is one of them. More importantly the powerful myth created when the author of the Mahavamsa foreshadows the landing of Vijaya and his followers and the establishment of the Buddha's religion in the island. Vijaya's arrival is made to synchronise with the date of the Buddha's passing away. As observed by K.M.de Silva, "This was to become in time the most powerful of the historical myths of the Sinhalese and the basis of their conception of them as the chosen guardians of Buddhism and of Sri Lanka itself as a place of special sanctity for the Buddhist religion".<sup>7</sup>

Yet in the treatment of important aspects of the political history of the island, the two Chronicles do differ. The Dipavamsa is more restrained. It contains only a brief reference to Duthagamani and Elara. It is interesting to note that while it refers to the earliest invaders from South India viz Sena and Guttika as Tamils, it does not identify Elara as such. It merely states that the Kshatriya prince named Elara, having killed Asela, ruled righteously for forty-four years. In this context, it may be relevant to note that at the time of the writing of the Dipavamsa (4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> century AD), nor during the one or two centuries prior to it, Lanka did not

experience invasions from South India. Sinhala and Tamil communities living in the island seem to have existed in the island without conflict. This may explain in part at least for the brief and dispassionate narration of the Duthagamani / Elara episode by the author of the Dipavamsa.

However, the narration of this same event appears to have changed completely in the hands of the author of the Mahavamsa. The portrayal of the Duthagamani / Elara war is seen not only as a racial war between the Sinhalese and Tamils but also as a holy war fought in the interests of Buddhism. Such a portrayal as pointed out earlier does not accord with the facts. There is material in the Mahavamsa itself which is inconsistent with such a treatment of the subject. In a historical sense, as W.I. Siriweera observes, "there is no evidence in the Mahavamsa to suggest that the Buddhists were persecuted under Elara".<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, the Chronicle itself states that Elara was a pious and just king and though himself a non-Buddhist had patronized Buddhism. More importantly, the author of the Mahavamsa who was obviously transposing to an earlier period, conditions more typical of his own times found it difficult to reconcile material available in his sources with the picture he was seeking to present. According to B.C. Law, no inscription is found until now to confirm the truth of the battles fought by Duthagamani with Elara. Given the Mahavamsa's portrayal of Duthagamani as a national hero of Lanka and the great builder of Buddhist religious monuments, this is indeed surprising. Besides as observed earlier by K.M.de Silva--"the facile equating of Sinhalese with Buddhist for this period is not borne out by the facts for not all Sinhalese were Buddhists while on the otherhand there were many Tamil Buddhists".<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, it was only during this time when the Mahavamsa was written that the Sinhalese were being given a distinct ethnic consciousness and their destiny tied up with Buddhism and the country. Even so, it may be mentioned that the term Sinhala appeared only twice in the whole Chronicle. Sinhala identity and ethnic consciousness were perhaps beginning to be articulated. But as yet, there was no perfect fit between Buddhism and the Sinhala people. As S.J. Thambiah sums up, "One thing is clear--the primordial golden age with a perfect fit between the Sinhala people, Sinhala language, Buddhism and the entire territorial space of the island could not have existed in Duthagamani's time and probably did not exist at the time the Mahavamsa was composed".<sup>10</sup> The Mahavamsa thus tended to mirror the realities of the sixth century into past events and project a politically biased account of the past.

There were other important changes which were taking place when the Mahavamsa came to be written. Not only was Theravada Buddhism in its traditional sense being affected by these changes, Buddhism itself on the sub-continent was under attack and the beginnings of its decline were seen in particular in South India. It may be recalled here that Buddhism at first originated as an ethical system and was essentially a monastic religion. But from the beginning as it developed in a Hindu environment, it began to change. As remarked by K.M.de Silva, "Although the spread of Buddhism was at the expense of Hinduism, the latter never became totally submerged but survived and had an influence on Buddhism. Its influence became more marked with the passage of time"<sup>11</sup>. Early Buddhist converts were mostly Hindus who could not forget the gods and goddesses they worshipped and their traditional beliefs. Hence Mahayanism, a form of Buddhism, originated in India in the first century AD under the direct influence of Hinduism. This system also known as Vaitulya Vada was opposed to the Theravada system or Southern School. Mahayanism came to mean the "Higher Vehicle" and took Sanskrit as the language of its exposition, while the latter Hinayana or "Lesser Vehicle" betook itself to Prakrit ( Pali ). Buddhism in both forms had to make accommodations to Hinduism. The first sign of this adaptation is seen in the growth of Mahayanism. Thus a worship and ritual gradually developed in Buddhism. Buddha himself came to be treated as a Divine Being. In Lanka, in the early Christian era, the Abhayagiri monks came under the influence of the Vaitulyan sect. Even some of the kings of Lanka began to take sides and King Mahasena began to persecute the monks of the orthodox school. His excesses led to a reversal and he eventually had to make amends for his misdeeds, though the rivalry between the two schools of thought continued for many more centuries.

The resurgence of Hinduism in South India saw the cult of Bakti (Devotion) emphasised by the Hindu Reformers and religion with the worship of personal gods, rituals and festivals brought to the people. Likewise the Mahayanists influenced by Hinduism extolled the benefits of worshipping the Bodhisattvas, literally beings whose essence is knowledge, who occupied a stage just below Buddhahood. The new attitude introduced by Hinduism resulted in greater worship of images and relics of the Buddha. Images became a feature of viharas and later every vihara had a statue of Buddha and its shrine room. In course of time, Hindu gods began to be worshipped in viharas as well. As observed by K.M. de Silva, the assimilation of the Hindu practices in Buddhism was

reinforced by the gradual accommodation in Buddhist mythology of Hindu deities such as Upuluvan, Saman and Natha. This had occurred by the tenth century. In the modes of worship of gods, the Buddhists generally followed the practices prevalent among the Hindus, going round a shrine, the mode of genuflections before the image of the deity and worshipping by joining the palms. The method of worship, "pooja" as offerings of flowers, milk-rice, incense and the lighting of oil lamps are other Hindu practices followed by the Buddhists. For example, adoring God with flower and incense was an ancient practice prevalent among the Hindus. Flower represents the heart and incense the melting of it. Again, similar to the Hindu festivals, ceremonies and car ( ther = chariot ) processions, the conduct of peraheras and festivals were commenced under the patronage of Sinhala kings. These accretions to the religion continued in the years ahead as well. Yet this changing body of thought and practice continued to be called Theravada with official sanction. As S.Goonatilaka observed, "Theraveda, therefore, in effect becomes not the original teaching as is usually implied, but the officially sanctioned corpus of state religion"<sup>12</sup>.

More importantly were the challenges made to Buddhism and Jainism in South India in particular. Buddhism did not progress after the early centuries of the Christian era and Jainism after the seventh century in South India. Hemmed in by Buddhist Lanka on one side and the Deccan which was Buddhist and Jain from early times, the Tamil country too had to give way to the peaceful penetration of the two non-theistic religions. But it was the first to overthrow the new religions. The seed of the revival of Hinduism was there but the necessary stimulus was given to it by the Saiva and Vaishnava saints, some of whom are placed in the early centuries of the Christian era. The religious resurgence seen in the emergence of the Bakti movement inspired and roused the people to a state of emotional surrender to the Divine. Groups of devotees led by inspired teachers traversed the land holding discourses, lectures, singing hymns and psalms. These saintly leaders came to be known as the Nayanmars. Among them, tradition chose sixty-three as being foremost and they were referred to as the sixty-three Nayanmars and their statues are objects of worship in Siva temples. Foremost among them were the Saiva Samayacharyas, Sambandar, Appar, Sundarar and Manikkavasagar. The preaching of these Saiva Samayacharyas was to re-establish the Saiva religion in all its glory. The new Bakti movement was a popular movement and expressed itself in the popular tongue- Tamil. It saw no difference in caste or gender and embraced all to its bosom as the anti-Vedic religions ( Buddhism and Jainism ) had done before.

By going back to pre-Vedic Saivism and in incorporating some elements of the new religions, it bridged the gap for the absorption of the Buddhists and Jains and paved the way for their return to the fold.

It was mainly due to the overpowering influences of the Saivite saints-- Sambandar, Appar, Sundarar, the Devaram hymners and Manikavasagar--that Hinduism began to regain lost ground not only in South India but also in North-East Lanka.. The ancient Siva temples of Tiruketeeswaram and Tirukoneswaram are sanctified in the hymns of the Saiva saints. According to C. S.Navaratnam, in the story of the Saivite saint Manikavasagar, it is said that a Lankan king went with his dumb daughter to Chidambaram to witness a religious controversy between some Buddhists priests of Lanka and St.Manikkavasagar. Although Manikkavasagar refuted all the points of the chief monk, the latter refused to concede defeat. Whereupon Manikkavasagar prayed to Lord Siva for the Goddess of Speech to depart the monk rendering him dumb. The astounded king then challenged Manikkavasagar to restore speech to his daughter who had not spoken since birth. The Saint subjected the girl to a series of questions. Her replies became the famous song Tiruchazhal. As a result of this miracle, the Lankan king, his entourage and the king's people all converted to Saivism. This king is said to be Sena I (831-851). The Sinhalese chronicle, Nikaya Sangrakwa, records that Sena I became a convert to the Saivite faith.

To the Tamil Saivites of the island, Saint Manikkavasagar and the great temple of Chidambaram become specially important. The Tiruvathavuradigal Puranam which contains the life history of the Saint began to be recited in all Hindu temples of the North and East of the island. Many rich Saivites made liberal grants of lands to the temple of Chidambaram and founded trusts for the maintenance of pilgrims' rests in the vicinity of the great temple. What this episode so clearly demonstrates is that Hinduism both in South India and North-East Lanka began to reassert itself and re-establish its predominance once again in these regions. The developments in South India had their repercussions in the island. More importantly, the Tamils who migrated in increasing numbers from the period of Pallava-Pandyascendancy in South India, which coincided with the Hindu revivalism there, tended to remain Hindu. They were not easily absorbed into the Buddhist population as before. They maintained their separate identity as Hindus and Tamils. As the influx of Tamils continued, so too their influence in the country. As S Pathmanathan sums up, "From the seventh

century onwards, the Tamils were an important element in the cultural, political and military affairs of the country"<sup>13</sup>.

The fifth and sixth centuries also witnessed the rise of Hindu powers, beginning with the Pallavas and followed by the Pandya and Cholas in succession in South India. These developments brought religious antagonisms to the fore. The Tamil States were militantly Hindu and quite intent on eliminating Buddhist and Jaina influence in South India. While earlier kings were liberal in their religious outlook, many of the later kings became ardent supporters of the new Bakti Movement. Thus for instance, the Pallava king Mahendravarman (580-636) who is believed to have been a Jaina at first, changed over to Saivism under the influence of the Saiva Saint Appar (himself a convert from Jainism ). Another was the Pandya king Arikesari who was also reclaimed for Saivism from Jainism by Saint Thirugnanasambandar. Thus in time, South Indian Buddhism and Jainism were all but wiped out. One result from this development was that the important religio-cultural link between South India and Lanka was severed. Another important consequence that flowed from this, as we have seen, was that the Tamils in Lanka became increasingly conscious of their ethnicity. They began to assert it in terms of their religion and culture-Hindu and Dravidian / Tamil. The Tamil settlements in the island became sources of support for South Indian Tamil invaders; the Tamil mercenaries with the Lankan kings became a potential fifth column

With the revival and resurgence of Hinduism on the South Indian mainland, there was a similar renewed awakening of Hinduism seen in the North and East of the island, regions predominantly occupied by the Tamils. The Tamils especially in these regions together with the new Tamil immigrants from South India now increasingly maintained their separate identity as Hindus. It is in this context, that the Mahavamsa came to be composed in the sixth century AD. The author of the Chronicle may have perceived a similar threat to the position of Buddhism in Lanka as in South India. As has been mentioned, the Mahavamsa is not only a political history but also an ecclesiastical history of Buddhism in the country. By the fourth century AD, the Sangha came to exist not only as a seat of learning, but its members thrived on the lands and endowments bestowed on the viharas. The monks had to defend their interests and this could best be done by rallying the king and the people on the side of Buddhism. Again, by the time the Mahavamsa came to be written, sectarian rivalries and open hostility were seen against the Tamil principalities and regions. It was about this time that

Dhatusena expelled the last of the Pandu (Pandyan) invaders and established his rule. Mahanama, the author of the Mahavamsa was an uncle of the King Dhatusena. The monks became involved in these sectarian disputes and supported the kings against the Tamils. As Rev.D J Kanagaratnam observes, "The Mahavamsa mirrors these rivalries of the sixth century in the descriptions of the past kings, whereas the Dipavamsa (written in the fourth century) is very restrained and realistic about the past"<sup>14</sup>. Hence as mentioned earlier, the Mahavamsa account of past events meant transposing to an earlier period conditions more typical of the author's own times.

But as seen earlier, times were changing, when the Mahavamsa came to be written. It was under such circumstances that a Sinhala ethnic consciousness was being articulated. The politically motivated author of the Mahavamsa may have perceived a similar threat to Buddhism in the island and hence the need to rally the king and people on the side of Buddhism. He may thus be justified in projecting developments in his day and thereafter on these lines. Both the Mahavamsa and the Culavamsa which followed it, present the view that support for the Sinhala dynasty against the "Damilas" (Tamils) is conducive to the glory of Buddhism in the island. But it was only after the developments in South India where a resurgent Hinduism adopted a hostile stance against both Buddhism and Jainism that the Tamils could credibly be shown as foes of the faith by the Buddhists in Lanka. It was about the seventh century and after that the prerequisite conditions matured making it possible to link Sinhala identity with Buddhism. Notwithstanding these developments, there were close political relations between the Pallava and Sinhala kings as we have seen. There were also in Lanka long periods of harmonious social relations between the Sinhalese and Tamils and strong religious and cultural ties. This is not surprising given the common origins of their religio-cultural base. Again, while a growing ethnic consciousness may be discerned among the Sinhalese elite, there was no ethnic purity at least among the kings and queens of Lanka and the princes and princesses. Nevertheless as observed by K.M.de Silva, "Sri Lanka from being a multi-ethnic polity became a plural society in which two distinct groups lived"<sup>15</sup>. Buddhism may thus be regarded as providing the first constitutive element in the growing ethnic and group consciousness of the Sinhalese. The other is language to which we shall turn to in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER XIV

### LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

What was the earliest language spoken by the people of Lanka? A language is invariably known from the name of the country in which it is spoken or from the name of the people who inhabit it. Thus in Tamilakam or Tamilnadu, Tamil is spoken or in England, English and in China, Chinese. According to C.Rasanayagam, "the name of Lanka applied to the country had not the slightest connection with its people or with the language spoken by them"<sup>16</sup>. We have seen that the name "Lanka" was bestowed to it by Indian tradition. But Lanka was also known as Elam or Ilam given to it by its neighbours, the Tamils of South India from a remote past. The name Elam has a direct affinity with the earliest language spoken in the island viz Elu. Thus according to C.Rasanayagam again, "The island must have been called Elam because Elu was spoken there; or perhaps the language was called Elu as it was spoken in Elam"<sup>17</sup>. Elu being a Dravidian dialect intermixed with Tamil was apparently introduced by the proto-Dravidian settlers from South India. It was the earliest spoken language of the ordinary people in the island as both the Yakshas and Nagas spoke it. It had a script and the earliest characters known to have been used by them are those found in the Tonigala and other similar inscriptions. However Elu being essentially a dialect had not reached a state of development to produce a literature of its own. The language used for that purpose was Tamil, which was also the language of the Royal Court and the elite. As we have seen, the Naga kings as well as the Naga poets excelled in the Tamil language and Naga poets participated in the Tamil Sangams. Again, Elu spoken by the people was understood by the Tamils as pointed out by Srinivasa Iyengar, showing the close affinity between the two. As may be inferred, Tamil was introduced to the island by the peaceful immigrants and traders from Tamilakam from very early times and together with Elu were the languages in use.

If the Sinhalese language was brought to the island by the mythical Vijaya, there is no trace whatsoever of this language in India either now or in the distant past. It is now accepted that it is a language that was created here and grew over a

long period of time. Besides, Sinhalese as a language only started evolving in the island after the introduction of Buddhism in the third century BC. The historical Vijaya and his followers, whatever may have been their ancestry, must have adopted the languages spoken in the island at that time viz Elu and Tamil. They could not have imposed their language whatever it may have been; for there is no evidence of it. But if Vijaya was of Indo-Dravidian ancestry, as is our supposition, he and his followers would have known to converse in Tamil. This is a further reason to suppose that he came from the Coromandel Coast; equally it is a reason for him to seek the hand of a Tamil princess from the Pandyan kingdom. With his subsequent marriage to a Pandyan princess and those of his followers to Pandyan maidens, there can be little doubt that the only language in which they could have conversed was Tamil. Again, the thousand families from the eighteen guilds who accompanied the Pandyan brides would only have known Tamil as they came from the Pandyan kingdom. Thus it could be inferred that the language of the Royal Court of the first dynasty of kings of Lanka was Tamil. As observed by C.Rasanayagam, "Tamil continued to be the Court language of Ceylon kings for several centuries".

With the introduction of Buddhism, came Pali and Sanskrit, as the texts and commentaries of Buddhism were mainly in the Pali language. Elu in its imperfect state could not stand up to the onslaught of Pali and Sanskrit. However as Pali and Sanskrit were languages of the educated and elite, a new language evolved over time for the people; this had a groundwork of Elu and Tamil and a superstructure of Pali and Sanskrit. These latter languages were instrumental in furnishing a voluminous vocabulary to the new language. In a similar manner were formed Malayalam and Telugu later on, when they branched off from Tamil as separate languages with a copious vocabulary of Sanskrit words. The Sinhala language which was in an early stage of development in the centuries before the Christian era, as seen from the undeveloped phraseology in the cave inscriptions of that period, took more than over a thousand years to reach that degree of development which was necessary for the composition of literary works in that language. For the first literary work composed in that language, it is said, was in the reign of Lilavati (1197 AD). Just as the process of forming the Sinhala race was going on by the continuing fusion of the Yakshas, Nagas and Tamils, so too the Sinhala language was growing by drawing on Pali and Sanskrit with Elu and Tamil as its groundwork.

It is clear to those who have examined the origins of the Sinhala language that the syntax and etymology are the same as in Tamil. As may be observed from the writings of Gate-Mudaliyar W.P. Gunawardene who pointedly said, "scientifically, the determining factor of a language is not its vocabulary but its structure---In this respect, Sinhalese is essentially a Dravidian language---Its evolution too seems to be on a Tamil basis". Father Closset also came to the same conclusion when he wrote that, "the construction of the sentences in Sinhalese is essentially Dravidian---many of its words, even the most elementary such as "inta", "wanta", "ganta" are of Dravidian origin". It will be seen that in Tamil, the roots of verbs can be made to form relative and verbal participles, verbal nouns etc. These are called the constitutive elements of roots. In the case of Sinhalese, many words are formed from the verbal or nominal stems of Tamil as the following examples show:

Sinhalese verbs derived from Tamil stems, participles etc

Tamil root	Tamil participle	Sinhalese
talla (to push) தள்ள	tallukira	tallukara
veesa(to throw) வீச	veesukira	veesikara
niyami(to nominate) நியமி	niyamikkira	niyamakara
oppa (to offer) ஒப்ப	oppukira	oppukara
ta (to give) தா	tanta	denta(t & d)*
wa (to come) வா	wanta	wenta
aniya(to dress) அனிய	aninta	andinta
aal (to rule) ஆல்	aanda	aanduwa

\*(t and d are identical)

In addition to such a list as above, Father Closset also gives two other lists. One is a list of Sinhalese-Tamil compound words, where the constitutive elements are all Tamil eg. Kandula=tears in Sinhalese. This word is derived from Kantuli; kan=eye and tul=drops in Tamil. In Sinhala "kan" has no meaning nor has "tuli". The other list is called inseparable suffixes made up from Tamil verbal forms and adjectives eg. Kurulla=bird in Sinhalese. It consists of two Tamil words; kur=sharp point and ulla=having. In Tamil the separate suffix ulla can be similarly used as in kanulla (having eyes), kathulla (having ears) but in Sinhalese the suffix cannot be used. As regards Sinhala words taken from Tamil, Father Closset thinks there are thousands of such words in the Sinhala language. Rev.

Fr. S. Gnanapragasam, a leading philologist, was also of similar opinion. Again, when the Sinhala Alphabet is considered, one sees how closely they follow the Tamil script in their formation. As Mudaliyar Gunawardene says, "I must say in fairness that the Sinhalese script is derived immediately from the Tamil to any reasonable mind, though remotely from the same source"<sup>6</sup>. The earliest alphabet is a local variety of the Brahma lipi like Tamil and which appears in the inscriptions of Asoka. Its origin seems to be in a Semitic script. The most ancient records are those met with over caves and the legend still reads from right to left as in the Semitic. As observed by Codrington, for centuries the Sinhala alphabet developed but gradually. But after the Sigiriya period, the writing becomes so degenerate that it is difficult to distinguish the various letters. The trend towards the modern script began about the eighth or ninth century.

As regards the claim that Sinhalese is an Aryan or Indo-Aryan language, such a claim cannot be sustained in the light of what has been already said. This is just as well in the case of the so-called Aryan vernaculars of India such as Gujarati, Marathi, Bengali etc. When these Dravidian dialects came into contact with Sanskrit, the language of the Aryans, the Dravidian dialects were super-imposed with Sanskrit words, but their structure remained the same. As has been mentioned earlier, the Dravidians were Aryanised in language and this is clearly seen in the case of the Aryan vernaculars. Again as Gate-Mudaliyar Gunawardene concludes, "Not only Sinhala but all the so-called Aryan vernaculars of India are founded on a structural basis mainly Dravidian and are indebted for much of the fundamentals of their structure to Dravidian influence"<sup>7</sup>. As far as Sinhalese goes, he goes on to say, "its evolution too appears to have been on a Tamil basis for it is dominated to a considerable extent by the principles of Tamil grammar and by Tamil idioms"<sup>8</sup>. According to Dr C.E. Godakumbara the oldest existing Sinhala grammar, the Sidatsangara (thirteenth century) drew from the Tamil grammar, the Virasoliyam. Being the work of one of their co-religionists, the Virasoliyam may have been studied in Buddhist colleges of Lanka in preference to other Tamil grammars. Thus as observed by Dr Godakumbara, "Tamil influenced not only the structure of the Sinhalese language, but also its grammatical terminology"<sup>9</sup>. And as K.M.de Silva remarks, "There was also a considerable Tamil influence on the vocabulary, idiom and grammatical structure of Sinhalese"<sup>10</sup>. Clearly the classification that would be applicable to the Sinhalese language is not Indo-Aryan but Indo-Dravidian.

The cardinal numbers used by the Sinhalese are identical with those used in the island of Minicoy which are as follows:

1=ekke;2=de;3=tine;4=hattare;5=pahe;6=haye;7=hatte;8=areg;9=nuve;10=dihe;  
11=egara eklus and 12=doloss.

The retention of ekkolahe for 11 and dolohe for 12 in the Sinhalese notation clearly proves the ancient connection of Minicoy with Lanka. This shows that Minicoy which is situated to the west of the South Indian peninsula must have at one time been connected with Lanka and that the Sinhalese had a duo-decimal system before it separated. According to C.Rasanayagam, there is clear indication thus that the Sinhalese borrowed the decimal system from the Tamils and this must have been after the third century BC. This must have probably synchronised with the submergence of the forty-nine Tamil lands which extended to the south of Cape Comorin also in the third century BC.

Much of the early culture and customs of the Sinhalese had a Tamil basis. It was from this early Dravidian basis that the present Sinhalese culture developed. There is evidence in Sinhala literary works to show that the Tamil language and its literature were studied in the colleges of even medieval Lanka. The poetry of the Tamils appears to have had a considerable influence over similar compositions of the Sinhala poets. In the didactic poem Subhasitaya (late sixteenth century), there are several stanzas which have their prototype in the Naladiyar. For example when Naladiyar, i, 6 is compared with Subhasitaya, 95 they both convey the following :

"Do not for ever hoard your wealth in diverse places but eat , drink and with compassion give alms. When you continually see the fate of the bees which store their honey, why do you greedily store your wealth ?"

The Lokopakaraya, a didactic poem by Ranawana Thera of Totagamuwa (1800) contains several verses which read like translations of the couplets of Tiruvalluvar's Kural. Again , when comparing Kural, i, vii, 61, with Lokopakaraya, 17 the following same ideas emerge:

"There is greater joy in the acquisition of virtuous, wise and learned children than in wearing on one's head manifold ornaments made of pearls, gems and gold".

There are also several Sinhala poems which have been derived from Tamil sources. The chief among them are the poems dealing with the story of the

goddess Pattini, whose cult was introduced to Lanka during the reign of Gajabahu (173-195). The story of Pattini is related in the Sinhala poems Vayantimalaya, Palangahalla, and Pattinhalla. These works had as their source the Tamil poems, the Silappadikaram and the Manimekalai. The story of the Mahabharata appears in Sinhala verse under the title of the Mahapadarangajatakaya. It is considered the longest Sinhala poem containing 1514 stanzas. In one of the introductory verses (no. 8), the author himself says that he translated the story from Tamil:

" Let wise people not consider any fault in this poem which was formerly recited in Tamil and which I now put into Sinhala."

Even the proper names in the story appear in their Tamil forms; for example Aruccana (Sanskrit = Arjuna), Tiriyotana (Sanskrit = Duryodhana), Sittirasenan (Sanskrit = Chitrasena) etc. Thus even some Sanskrit works have come to the Sinhalese through the medium of Tamil.

We may for instance take another aspect of this culture viz nadagam (drama) or in Sinhalese "nadagama". The nadagam, the art of the drama has been so much a feature of Tamil culture that there has been a distinct category of the Tamil language, the nadaga-tamil. Speaking of Sinhalese nadagamas, E R Saratchandra observes that, "The earliest nadagams, we may infer from the texts themselves, as well as from the existence of the prototypes in the Tamil language were translated into Sinhalese from Tamil originals"<sup>11</sup>. Of the music of the Sinhalese nadagamas, Saratchandra makes the following remarks. "The nadagam is a lyrical play consisting largely of verses and songs. The verses are in Tamil metres and they are chanted without measured time. A large number of metres are used, the most commonest among them being the Viriduwa, ( in Tamil=Viruttam )"<sup>12</sup>. According to Dr C.E. Godakumbara, " Several popular plays owe their origin to South India. The Sokarikatava or Guruhatana is one of them. The very words *kolama* (kolam) and *nadagama* (nadagam) denoting popular dramas have come to Sinhalese through Tamil"<sup>13</sup>.

A close examination of the social customs of the Sinhalese point to a Tamil / Hindu origin. The fact that the Sinhalese choose to commence their New Year with what is after all a Hindu festival speaks a lot for the common cultural origins of the Sinhalese and Tamils. Till the beginning of this century, the Sinhalese did not celebrate a new year. It was only later on that they chose to celebrate it as Sinhala New Year or Avuruddu along with the Tamil New Year. According to the ancient Dravidians, the dawn of the New Year ushering in the

debut of spring in the month of Chittarai ( April ) is marked by the transition of the Sun from the last house ( Pisces ) of the Zodiac to the first house ( Aries ) which takes place every year at a precise moment. From time immemorial, the Hindus have considered this transition as an auspicious event, for the Sun (Surya Bhagawan) is the presiding deity of the planetary system and the giver of all life. It marks the onset of the rains and the sowing of seed. The New Year hence also marks the beginning of the agricultural cycle. The Hindu New Year festival is thus associated with a wealth of traditions, rituals and customs. Some of these have been adopted into the Sinhala Avuruddu.

As stated earlier, language was the other main constitutive element in the making of the Sinhala ethnic identity. Notwithstanding its origins from an Elu and Tamil base, like the Aryan vernaculars of India, it developed into a distinct language by borrowing copiously from Pali and Sanskrit in its vocabulary. In this process, Buddhism provided the greatest stimulus. The Buddhist scriptures which were brought to the island by the Asokan missionaries and handed down orally were in Pali. When they were subsequently committed to writing in the first century BC, it was also done in Pali. But around these scriptures, there grew a body of writing in Sinhala primarily for the purpose of conveying its ideas to those not conversant in Pali. By the second century AD, Sinhala was being used for literary purposes. But as observed by K.M.de Silva, Pali did not remain the only influence on Sinhala. Sanskrit, the language of the Mahayanists and the Hindu scriptures, with a richer idiom and vocabulary, left a stronger impression on Sinhala in the later centuries of the Anuradhapura period. However very little of the literary work in Sinhala of this period survived. In any case, none had any literary pretensions. The earliest known Sinhala work was the Siyabaskara, a Sinhalese version of the Sanskrit Kavyadars, a work on rhetoric. Its author was probably Sena IV (954-6). Thus the major creative contribution of the Sinhalese in this period of the Anuradhapura kings was in Pali.

As mentioned earlier, Pali and Sanskrit being the languages of the erudite and elite, particularly of the clergy, Sinhala developed as the language of the people. But it was a long process before there was a fit between the Sinhala people and the Sinhala language. As R.A.L.H. Gunawardene remarked, "It is only by about the 12th century that the Sinhala grouping could have been considered identical with the linguistic grouping"<sup>14</sup>. This was naturally so as the Sinhala grouping itself was the result of a gradual process of aggregation and incorporation of other settlements and categories of people not unrelated to them. Further it is by

virtue of a linguistic incorporation and not by descent that the grouping would have become Sinhala. The process of Sinhalization of the Dravidian peoples has in fact continued through the centuries in Lanka's history right into our times. Together with such a development, a distinctly evolved Sinhala language in time became the other main constitutive element in the make-up of the Sinhala polity. As is known, Sinhala today is not spoken by any other people outside Sri Lanka. Thus the Sinhalas made themselves into a faith and grouping with a language. But this linguistic development was a long process over a thousand years, as seen..



## CHAPTER XV.

### THE TAMIL HERITAGE

The heyday of Tamil civilization and culture was in ancient times. As Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy observed, "In the far south ( Dravida ), three ancient kingdoms, the Chola, Chera and Pandya maintained an old and independent civilization distinguished in literary achievement and sea-borne trade with Europe and the Far East". The extensive commercial intercourse provided the material basis for a flowering of the civilization and culture of the Tamils. The greatest legacy of the Tamils to the world are their religion, Saivism and their language, Tamil, with its abundantly rich literature. Its greatness lies in the fact that they remain to this day a living religion and a living language from a distant past. The great virtue of the Saiva religion is that it has the greatest volume of philosophical and religious literature in the language of its people--Tamil. The major portion of the devotional hymns--thevarams--from the fifth century to the present day relate to Saivism. The Tamil kings were great temple builders. They patronised the Tamil language and literature as epitomised in the Three Tamil Sangams ( Academies ) as well as the arts--architecture, sculpture, painting, music and dance. The Tamil people thus have a rich and proud legacy in all these which date-back to an ancient past. Unlike Greece and Rome where once a culture existed but now does not, the ancient culture of the Tamils continues to exist in Tamilnadu, north-east Lanka and in those parts of the world where Tamils live. The legacy of the Tamils may be treated briefly under Saivism, the Tamil language and literature and the Tamil people and culture.

#### 1) Saivism:

Saivism is one of the oldest religions of the world, older even than what is now called Hinduism. Hinduism, if we look at the derivative meaning of the word is no definite religion. As mentioned earlier, to the invaders from the north-west, the people living beyond the river Sindhu in India were Sindhurs or Hindus and their religion came to be called Hinduism. But long before this, the people in the vast sub-continent had a religion though probably no name for it, as there was no need for one. With the coming of the Aryans , the Vedic cult and the Sanskrit

language, the necessity to denominate it arose. God the Absolute came to be called Siva and the religion Saivism. The point that needs to be emphasised is that the religion was there, its principles and philosophy were there, its concept of God was there; it only needed to be given a name. The relics excavated at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa point to a civilization some millennia before Christ where the figure of Siva and Siva worship were seen. As Sir John Marshall commenting on his findings stated, "Among the many revelations that Mohenjo-daro and Harappa had in store for us, none perhaps is more remarkable than this discovery that Saivism has a history going back to the chalcolithic or perhaps even further still and that it thus takes its place as the most ancient living faith in the world"<sup>2</sup>. Hence Saivism is a Dravidian religion. When later the intermingling of the Dravidian and Aryan civilizations took place, Saivism became an integral part of the composite Hindu religion or Hinduism. As Dr.Pope observes, "Saivism is the old pre-historic religion of South India existing from pre-Aryan times and holds sway over the hearts of the Tamil people"<sup>3</sup>. Today the Saivas or Saivites, the followers of Saivism live not only in Tamilnadu and other parts of India, but also in Sri Lanka, Myanmar ( Burma ), Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, South Africa, Fiji, Hawaii, Mauritius and several other places; in fact wherever the Tamil people live, we have Saivism. The Tamil diaspora from Lanka has now carried it to several other countries.

As we have seen, the early Tamils of Lanka were followers of Saivism from the very beginning. As testimony to this are the hallowed shrines to God Siva, the five isvarams from a hoary past. Tradition has it that the central personages in the Indian epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, such as Rama, Ravana and Arjuna were associated with the temples of Muneeswaran ( Chilaw ), Tirukoneswaram ( Trincomalee ) and Tiruketeeswaram, ( Mannar ) respectively. These temples earned the adoration of the people of not only Lanka but also all India. Tamil kings of South India such as Kulakoddan and Rajaraja Cholan had repaired and endowed these temples. The temples of Tiruketeeswaram and Tirukoneswaram are of particular significance as they have been sanctified in the hymns of the Nayanmars ( St. Sambandhar and St. Sundarar ). Sekkilar in his immortal work, the Periyapuram has given a description of these two historic temples. These shrines have been from ancient times, sacred places frequented by Tamils. C.S.Navaratnam lists a large number of ancient temples to God Siva in widely different parts of the country. Some of them are the Santhirasegaram Temple at Dondra Head, (though there is no trace of it now), Santhirasegaram Temple at Cheddikulam in the Mannar district

(about 289 AD ), Nagathambiran Kovil at Nagarcoil on the eastern coast of the Jaffna Peninsula, ( Thambiran is another name for Isvara; this temple is associated with the Nagas ). Two other ancient Sivan temples are the Thanthonyeswaram temples in Odduchuddan and Kokkaddycholai in the Mullaitivu and Batticaloa Districts respectively. Even kings of Lanka are on record as having repaired or endowed some of these Hindu temples. Saivism thus has been the living religion of the Tamils of Lanka from ancient times.

Saivism is a religion based on a philosophy of Truth and Love, known as Saiva Siddhanta. It is a revealed religion; it has not been established by any prophet or seer. Though there were several schools of Saivism from the earliest times, the school that was current in Tamilakam from the earliest, at least at the beginning of the Christian era is Saiva Siddhanta which we simply call here as Saivism. If one were to define Saivism, it may be said, that it is not a mere religion with age old beliefs and practices, not mere worship, not any abstract philosophy; it is all these and more; it was and is a way of life. The central doctrine of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy is that Siva is the Supreme Reality; the Jiva or the individual soul is of the same essence as Siva but not identical. The three entities in Saivism are God ( Pati ), Soul ( Pasu ) and Bonds ( Pasa ). In addition there are 36 Tattvas or principles into which the universe is analysed. The definition of God in Saivism is said to be Sat-Chit-Ananda. It is Truth, Knowledge and Bliss. The term Sivam is a vedic term meaning that which confers bliss; the state of eternal bliss is Siva-gati. This has been personified as the Supreme Reality, Siva. Those who strive to attain it have been and are called Saivas or Saivites. The traditional definition of Saivism also conforms to this view. The Soul is also eternal and distinct from the body. It has the functions of willing, thought and action. According to its karma, past as well as present, it is given bodies. In inhabiting the bodies, it undergoes the cycle of births and deaths. The Bonds are the third entity and they are anava, karma and maya. Anava is one in all beings, eternal, dense and varied. Karma is the cause of the union of the conscious soul with the unconscious body. Maya is the material cause of the universe. The Soul to attain eternal Bliss or inseparable union with Siva has to rid itself of anava which darkens it, reduce to nought all its karma so that there is no longer any residual karma causing a rebirth and shake off maya which is the cause of all impurities. All this can be achieved only through the uplifting grace of God. Service to godly men and temple worship will help to ward off further karma. When there is no more rebirth, maya also automatically ceases. With the three bonds reaching a stage of subdual and removal, God's grace settles on

one. When the Soul leaves the body, it attains an inseparable union with Siva ever enjoying the bliss which He bestows. This is the state of Mukti. Unlike in Vedanta, the soul while uniting with Siva retains its identity. The state of union is said to be non-advaita (non-dual) or Sivatva.. Thus Saiva Siddhanta is midway between Sankara's Advaita and Ramanuja's Visishtadvaita.

Philosophy and religion in Hinduism are not distinct and different unlike Western spiritual traditions. There is a blending of the two. Philosophy is not mere abstract science; it has the goal of uplifting man. Religion is not mere superstitious faith; it is founded on scientific and logically established truths and it lays down the means for uplifting man. Thus according to Dr.S.Radhakrishnan, "The Hindu religion is marked by an eminently rational character"<sup>4</sup>. Again as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru says, "I like---the rationalistic background (of the Upanishads)",<sup>5</sup>the Scriptures of Hinduism. This happy blending of philosophy and religion is responsible for the outlook of the Hindu as well as the Saivite on life in general. While other religions may view life as one of suffering or as sinful, the Hindu religion is positive. It finds a supreme purpose in life and in living. Life is not unreal but is transient and so the happiness it offers is also transient. Man should therefore strive to attain that which is permanent. Such a view of life emphasises the correct attitude towards even transience. If even through transience, he is to proceed to permanence, he should follow a moral code of conduct, a Dharma or Righteousness even in this life. This sets a goal for him to live for and strive for. Viewed in this light, we find that Saivism reduces itself to a way of life. Saivism has been and is an open religion; the goal is one; it is the same for all; the paths leading to it are many. It shows the way to all mortals to strive consciously for liberation from the bonds and for attaining moksha or inseparable union with God. It has devised different ways of seeking God, to suit the different moulds in which human beings are cast. Man may worship God in any form and Siva's Grace is bestowed on him through that form. Thus Saivism is a universal religion and its universality is based on its general tolerance and the firm conviction that God is one, though he may take multiple forms and He dwells in all.

Tamil literature from ancient times in the Tamil country has been predominantly religious and the major part of it was influenced by Siva worship. Saiva philosophical literature in Tamil dates back to at least the fifth century AD. This itself reflects the thoughts that had been current in the land in the Tamil language for more than a thousand years earlier. Saivism has adopted the Vedas as the

foundation scripture of its tenets. The Saivas believe that the Upanishads are a collection of eternal truths revealed by Siva to enlightened seers ( rishis ) of the ages past. However the Saiva religion takes it name from the all knowing Siva himself. The Saiva is always to strive for the realisation of the Truth, the attainment of the One-ness with the Supreme Siva. Hence the other things mentioned in the Vedas are not for him. Saivism does not accept the authority of the Smritis. Instead it holds the Saiva Agamas as having equal authority with the Vedas. The principal Saiva Agamas are twenty-eight in number. Like the Vedas, the Saiva Agamas too have been revealed by Siva to enlightened seers. Each Agama consists of four parts, each complete in itself. The first part is the Vidyapada dealing with the three entities of God, Soul and Matter ( Bonds ) and the efforts of the Soul to liberate itself from the bonds and attain inseparable union with Siva. The Kriyapada deals with personal worship and congregational temple worship, festivals in temples, installation of images and like subjects; this part is the basis for all architecture, sculpture and dance. The other two parts are the Yogapada dealing with ashtanga yoga and other yogas and similar subjects and the Chariyapada dealing with the daily religious observances and austerities to be practised by a Saiva. The Puranas and the Ithihasas have religious currency in all branches of Hinduism. Of the eighteen Puranas, ten are Saiva puranas. Some of them have been rendered into Tamil verses and are part of the rich heritage of Tamil literature. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are epics for the whole of India and the Hindus. Viewed from a religious standpoint, the epics for the Saivas are the Siva-mahapuranam, the Siva-rahasya and the Skanda-puranam.

The Saiva canonical books in the Tamil language are twelve in number and they are also known as the Tamil Veda. Saints like Tiru Gnana Sambandar, Appar, Sundarar and Manikkavasagar had toured the Siva shrines in the Tamil country and by their devotional songs captured the minds and hearts of Saivas everywhere. The Acharyas by their words and their lives had been shining examples of what is generally known as bakti marga, the pathway to God through devotional love and surrender. Their hymns are in the peoples' own language, Tamil and are sung in temples even today. They are the richest legacy of the Tamil people and have moved them as nothing else. The first seven books constitute the Thevarams, the hymns of the first three Acharyas while the eight book is the Tiruvacakam from the fourth Acharya, Manikkavasagar. The tenth book is the Tirumantiram, which is a hymn as well as a scripture. The twelfth book is the Saiva hagiology, it gives in 4286 quatrains the lives of Saiva men of

God. It is the glory of the Saiva world. Its author Sekkilar was a minister under a Chola emperor of the twelfth century. For these reasons, this book is known as the Periya-puranam. The ninth and eleventh books of the Saiva canon are anthologies of other devotional poetry earlier than the eleventh century; the ninth consists of musical pieces and the eleventh consists of poetic pieces. A later collection of all these Saivite hymns by Nandi Andar Nandi is known as the Tirumurai.

Saivism in the Tamil country has the unique honour of having all its jnana sastras written originally in the Tamil language. Thoughts on the three entities, God, Soul and Matter, are found scattered all over the utterances of the Saiva Acharyas in their hymn books. It was given to Saint Meykander in the twelfth century AD to codify them in logical sequence into a basic text for Saivism known as Sivagnana Bodham. It contains twelve aphorisms ( sutras ) and deals with the nature of the three entities, their attributes, the means of knowing them and finally attaining oneness with Siva. This work is the basic text, the Scripture of Saiva Siddhanta. His chief disciple St.Arulnandi has written a very large metrical commentary on the aphorisms. This is known as the Sivagnana-siddhi. It is a refutation of fourteen alien schools of thought and a brilliant exposition of the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy in all its intricacies and comprehensiveness. A disciple of St.Arulnandi is Umapati who wrote several books. All these and other books of saints in this line have been collected into a group of fourteen and they are known by the collective name of the fourteen Siddhanta Sastras. These together constitute the entire body of the Sastras of the Saivas.

## 2) Tamil Language and Literature

While the antiquity of the Tamil language is acknowledged, the origin of the name "Tamil" for the language is not precisely known. A plausible explanation is the one given by G.Oppert. He derives the word Tamil from Tirumala, the sacred Mala language. The Dravidian word for mountain is mala ( Tamil=malai ) from which the names of Dravidian mountain tribes are derived such as mala,mallas,malavas malayas etc. Hence Tirumala is the sacred tongue of the mala tribes. The change from Tirumala to Tamil took place over a period of time when tiru became tira or tara, then contracted to tra or dra and finally to ta or da as both letters t and d being identical. The terms Dramila, Dramida and Dravida are seen as Aryan corruptions of Tirumala and found their way back into South Indian languages as foreign expressions. Properly speaking, the term

Dravida is applicable not only to Tamil but also to the other Dravidian languages. The word Dramila occurs in Sanskrit literature. The name Tirumala is also recognised in Tamala or Damala of Damalavarubhayam near Pandamangalam in the Tiruchinopoly District. Pandamangalam is regarded as an old capital of ancient kings among whom the name Tirumala did occur. Damala or Demala is found in Pali and Sinhalese to refer to Tamils. Thus from Tirumala is derived the word Tamil which came to refer to the language and the people. There are other explanations for the origin of the word Tamil as well, as referred to earlier.

Tamil is one of the great classical languages of the world. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Tamil is perhaps the only example of an ancient classical language which continues as a spoken tongue for more than 2500 years without undergoing any basic change in its structure". The Tamil language has a originality and independence of its own. According to Wilson, "The base of Tamil, the most highly cultivated as regards its original structure of all the Dravidian languages has an independent origin". The following peculiarities in Tamil lend support to the position that Tamil is an independent language. In Tamil grammar, gender and number are treated under one head, "pal", ( பால் ), peculiar to the Tamil language. The indications of tense, present, past and future by doubling of the root by affixes and inter-letter ( Idainilai = இடைநிலை ) for each tense are peculiarities not found elsewhere. More than one half of Tolkappiyam deals with Poruladhikaram which is a branch of grammar peculiar to the Tamil language. The Tamil prosody especially "vemba" ( வெண்டா ) possesses rules which are peculiarly its own and such rules are not to be found in the prosody of any other language. So much so that according to G.Slater, "The characteristics of the Tamil language are its subtlety, its sense of logic and its richness in honorifics. These and other peculiarities will go to show that Tamil is an original and independent language".

The distinction between "Tenmoli" ( தென்மொழி = Tamil ) and "Vadamoli" ( வடமொழி = Sanskrit ) could only have arisen when there were two languages standing side by side on their own. As Dr Macleane observes, "There is little doubt that the Dravidian languages are comparatively older in point of time than Sanskrit". When the two came into contact, Tamil just as much as Sanskrit, was influenced by the other. Just as Sanskrit words have found a place in Tamil, so Tamil and other Dravidian words have found a place in Sanskrit. Borrowing has

been common to both. It is clear however that the Dravidian languages belong to a stock distinct from Sanskrit. As Professor Julien Vinson says, "Tamil and Sanskrit in spite of some analogues of words have no connection whatsoever. Their grammatical systems so widely differ that they certainly proceed from quite different origins". The Aryans on their arrival on the north-western frontier found the Dravidians settled in flourishing communities. It can be asserted that the subsequent development of the uncultured vedic tongue which resulted in Sanskrit was owing to the influence of the highly civilised Dravidians, when the former came into contact with the latter. At the period of the Aryan irruptions into India, the Dravidian languages prevailed in the north of India as well. It is not surprising therefore to note the presence of the Dravidian element in Sanskrit. It can easily be maintained that much that is not found in Latin and Greek but peculiar to Sanskrit alone is due to the contact with the Dravidians. As Professor Rhys Davids maintains, "The Dravidian dialects affected profoundly the sounds, the structure, the idiom and the vocabulary of Sanskrit. The differences between the Vedic language and its hypothetic parent Indo-Germanic are due to the influence of the Dravidian dialects of India". It is shown by Dr.Taylor that a Dravidian / Tamiloid language now represented by its most cultivated branch in the south of India constituted the original staple of all the languages of India. This is now being increasingly recognised by the students of Indian philology. As suggested by P.T.Srinivasa Iyengar, a complete picture of the neolithic culture of India can be constructed from a study of pure Tamil words. The elementary Tamil words are all monosyllabic such as can very well be represented by the pictographic script referred to by Sir John Marshall. Hence it can be maintained that the languages spoken in India in very ancient times were all dialects of a proto-Dravidian or proto-Tamil language.

The Dravidian genius was seen not merely in the sphere of language but also in literature. Of all the races of India, the only people who had a poetical literature, independent of Sanskrit are the Tamils, a typical Dravidian people. The metres and rules of versification of Tamil poetry are different from those of Sanskrit. Tamil preserves to this day, its ancient metres of Ahaval (அகவல் ), Vemba (வெம்பா ), Kalippa ( கலிப்பா ) and Vanjippa (வஞ்சிப்பா ). The ancient Tamil poetry with its possession of manifold, varied and polished forms, independent of Sanskrit models, leads one to conclude that the Tamil language had a literature of its own, long before its contact with Sanskrit. Without a poetic literature, metres and rules of versification are meaningless. Turning to Tamil grammar, the grammatical treatise of Agastyar, called Agaththiam (circa eight

century BC ) was very elaborate and divided into three distinct departments viz lyal, Isai and Natakam. At the time the Tolkaappiyam was composed (circa 4th century BC), there were already in existence many grammatical treatises such as Agaththiam, Mapuranam, Bhutapuram, Isainunukam, Kuruku and Narai. The commentator of the Silappathikaram, Adiyarkunallar who lived about the second half of the twelfth century says that these works had become extinct before their time, save for a few quotations preserved in old commentaries. Tamil would have been already well advanced when Agastyar undertook the composition of his grammar. Besides, evidence furnished by the language itself show that there was a distinctive Tamil literature even before the time of Agastyar. The grammar, Tolkaappiyam by Tolkaappiyar, is a masterpiece and could only have been composed when the language had reached its pristine maturity. References in the Tolkaappiyam itself show that there existed a certain volume of literature in Tamil before its composition.

The three Tamil Sangams were, according to traditional accounts, bodies of learned men. The Talaichangam ( First Sangam ) is said to have been held in Southern Mathurai and consisted of five-hundred and forty-nine members; sixteen thousand,one hundred and forty-nine authors came to its notice. The gems of the First Sangam literature were Perumparipadal, Mudukuruku, Mudunarai, Kalariyavirai. The authoritative grammar of this epoch is Agattiyam, the grammar of Agastyar. The Sangam was patronised by eighty-nine Pandyan kings. The Idaichangam ( Second Sangam ) consisted of fifty-nine members; three-hundred and seventy authors came to this academy. The authoritative grammars were the Agattiyam and Tolkaappiyam. Some of the works of this period were Mapuranam, Isainunukkam, Perum-Kalittogai, Kuruhu and Vendali. The Sangam was patronised by fifty-seven Pandyan kings. Kapatapuram was the seat of this Sangam. The Kadaichangam ( Third Sangam ) consisted of forty-nine members; four-hundred and forty-nine authors flourished during this period. A few works of this Sangam were Narrinai, Purananuru and Kurunthokai. Forty-nine kings patronised this Sangam. It may be mentioned that the period of time ascribed to each of the three Sangams is fabulously long. Any work published by anybody to be made a part of Tamil literature required the sanction of these Sangams, the sovereign organs of the highest literary authority. Many works must have sunk into oblivion because they did not receive the imprimatur of the Sangam. Even Valluvar, the author of the Kural had much difficulty in convincing the Sangam pandits of the merits of his work. The

tradition of the Sangam is further proof of the antiquity of the literature of the Tamils.

The literature of the Tamils is quite unique in the East. It is the outcome of the genius of the people themselves. It is a mirror which reflects the civilization and culture of the ancient Tamils. The Tolkappiyam is the most ancient composition extant in Tamil literature written by Tolkappiyar, otherwise known as Tiranadumagni. Among the sources which throw light on the conditions political and social of the Tamil people in ancient times, the Tolkappiyam will easily hold pride of place. Its subject matter is the history of the Tamil race and the life in the ancient Tamil country. A critical study of it will enable us to discover the philosophy it incorporated, which embraces in full the main principles of all the six schools of Hindu philosophy. Cheetalai-chattanar, the author of the Manimekalai was an eminent logician, poet and theologian and professed Buddhism. Ilanko-adikal, the brother of King Chenk-kudduvan composed the Silappathikaram. These two works, the Manimekalai and the Silappathikaram are considered as the Tamil epics. According to a writer in the Siddhanta Dipika, the originality of the stories in the Manimekalai and the Silappathikaram cannot be gainsaid. They have a distinct locale and the writers are pure Tamilians. For chasteness of expression, elevation of thought, beauty of imagery, grandeur of conception and treatment, occasional flights of imagination and homely and practical criticism of men and life, these works stand unrivalled. The heroic poem of the Pathirupathu, the beautiful odes of the Ahananuru, the Purananuru, Kalithokai and the Pathupattu help to maintain the Tamil fame on the lyric side. The Kural is another masterpiece in Tamil literature, one of the noblest and purest expressions of human thought. The Kural owes its popularity among the Tamils as much to the beauty of its versification as to its morality. Auvvaiyar, the most famous of Tamil poetesses, whose two books of aphorisms entitled Attichudi and Konrai-venthan, written in the order of the Tamil alphabet have been most appropriately called the "Golden Alphabet of the Tamils".

All that was original and classical in the literature of the Tamils was written before the ninth century. A careful study of ancient Tamil poetry shows that some of the earliest works were composed more than two-thousand years ago. The first century of the Christian era is called the Augustan period of Tamil literature. The Third Sangam was held in Mathurai during this time. The works of no less than fifty authors have come down to us from that time. These poets belonged to different castes, various religious persuasions and came from

different parts of Tamilakam. As we have seen this included Elamandalam (Ilankai) which was also represented by some of its authors. There were Brahmins, some Nigranths and even some Buddhists. There were kings, priests, merchants, doctors, farmers and artisans among its members. Some of the galaxy of poets and authors who adorned this period were Uirththirakannanar (AD 40-70), Kapilar (AD 90-130), Nakkirar (AD 100-130), Mankudi Maruthanar (AD 90-130), Thiruvalluvar (AD 100-130), Auvvaiyar (AD 100-130), Cheetalai-chattanar (AD 110-140) and Ilanko-adikal (AD 110-140). More than twenty-five thousand lines of verse written by poets who flourished between the years AD 50-150 are still extant and furnish ample material to study the history and civilization of the ancient Tamils. This was indeed the Golden Age of Tamil literature.

### 3)Tamil People and Culture

As we have seen, the Dravidian people had already developed a civilization of their own long before the Aryan influx. They reached a high degree of civilization by their own unaided efforts. As observed by G.Slater, the reason why the Aryan influence was so different in Southern India from what it was in the North appears to be that there already existed well organised communities and kingdoms. The southern Dravidians were never disturbed by any extensive immigrations and hence retained their distinctive characteristics. These considerations led to the conclusion that the Tamil civilization and culture that arose had an independent development of its own, though no doubt influenced by external factors. South India thus emerged as the home of Tamil civilization and culture.

The economic basis for the flowering of Tamil culture lay with the extensive commercial intercourse and the development of agriculture by the Tamil kingdoms in South India. The Dravidian races traded with the ancient Chaldeans and Egyptians; Indian teak from South India was found in the ruins of Ur, the seaport of Babylon and the capital of the Sumerian kings in the fourth millennium BC. It may be noted that gold, silks, pearls, spices and other merchandise have been flowing into Assyria, since the first Assyrian Empire in the 14th century BC. The Ophir expedition started once in three years in King Solomon's time (962-930 BC). According to G.Oppert, "the navy of Tarshish brought gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks from India"<sup>10</sup>. Later on, an extensive trade with Greece and Rome developed and which has been referred

to earlier. The Sanskrit name for pearls ( mukta ) is from the Tamil "muttu"; the Hebrew name for peacock ( tukim ) is from the Tamil "tokai"; and the Greek name for rice ( oryza ) is from the Tamil "arisi". The existence in the Tamil language of pure Tamil words like kadal, punari, arkali, munmir etc to denote the sea and kalam, marakalam, mithavai, kappal etc to refer to ship proves that the Tamils from the earliest times were a sea-faring people. They were navigators, traders and merchants. Again the old Tamil proverbs have a tale to tell. "Though Elalasingham's goods go across the seven seas, they will return safely". Another old saying is, "Thirai kadal odiyum thiraviyam thedu". ( திரை கடலேயும் திரவியம் தேடு ) =Seek fortune, even if you have to cross the seas and waves.) These illustrate the character and culture of the Tamil people among whom it sprang. The wide-ranging commercial enterprise of the Tamils in ancient times led to an enrichment of the Tamil civilization consequent upon the constant and lively exchange of ideas and experiences with the different peoples of the world."

As we have seen, the early Dravidians also developed a settled existence quite early in their development in South India. They tilled the ground and raised various kinds of grains eg. rice and sesamum. As G.Slater observed, "Rice growing is obviously the economic basis of Dravidian culture"<sup>11</sup>. Many other millets were grown in addition to rice but the ploughs and other implements used for cultivating the millets were borrowed from rice cultivation. That the Tamils had made very great strides in the development of agriculture is seen from several sources of evidence. The only extant Tamil poem of the age of the Mahabharata War ( circa 1500 BC ) sings the praises of the Chera king who supplied rations of rice to both the warring armies. The names "marutham", the land on which paddy and other grains are grown with the aid of irrigation, as well as the words for paddy ( nel = நெல் ) and rice ( arisi = அரிசி ) are all Dravidian terms. Sir John Hewitt says that, "the Dravidians were of all the great races of antiquity, the first to systematise agriculture"<sup>12</sup>. Archaeology also confirms this. For instance, it is affirmed that the people who used burial urns must have been an agricultural race, as brass and iron implements of agriculture were often found buried in their graves. Again it was the Dravidians who developed irrigation systems with their agriculture and introduced it to Lanka. It is no wonder that the Tamils extolled agriculture and farming as the noblest of vocations, best expressed in the following Kural couplet:

ஊழுண்டு வாழவாரே வாழவார்மற நெல்லாம்  
தொழுண்டு பின்சல பவர்.

*"Who ploughing eat their food, they truly live;  
The rest to others subservient, eating what they give.*

(Kural:1033)

Two of the religious and social festivals of the Tamils are Thai Pongal and Tamil New Year. Thai Pongal, the festival of the month of Thai, inaugurates the season of religious and social festivals. There is a series of four festivals viz Bhogi Pandigai, Pongal, Mattu Pongal and Kannu Pongal celebrated in South India; in Ilankai it is a two-fold festival of Thai Pongal and Paddi (Mattu) Pongal. Thai Pongal is essentially a harvest festival, a thanks-giving to the Sun God for a bountiful harvest. Pongal or milk-rice is cooked and offered to the Sun God amidst excited cries of "Pongalo Pongal". After this everyone has a good feed of the tasty Pongal and a spirit of gaiety and friendliness pervades. Another national day of all round rejoicings is the Tamil New Year. The day is the same for the Malayalee New Year and Sinhala New Year as well as for many others. The correspondence is one that extends to the customs of observance as well. An astrological forecast is made for the year and temples are visited. At home everyone sits for the first meal of the day, a meal of milk-rice special to the New Year. Presents in money are made by the master of the house to all, the custom of Kaivishasam. For the cultivator, it is the day of first ploughing, coinciding with the birth of spring and the beginning of the agricultural cycle. To everyone, it is a day of rejoicing for friendly calls and social visits.

The twin arts of Dance and Music are the brightest gems of India's culture. South India's special contribution to that culture are Bharata Natyam and Carnatic Music. Both are based and developed on very sound principles from the days of Bagavatham. The historical roots of that tradition can be found in Bharata's "Natya Sastra". There is a rich literature. References to both in the sacred and secular literature help to trace the development of these arts through the centuries. Both have a religious basis and have been associated with the temples. In the case of Bharata Natyam for instance there are hundreds of compositions based on the concept of Madhura Bakti, the theme of Nayakan-Nayaki bhava. The feelings and experiences of an ideal devotee yearning for God have their parallels in the feelings and experiences of an ideal Nayaki desiring union with the Nayakan of her choice. The concept of spiritualised love has inspired many composers down the centuries. Another facet of Bharata

Natyam is the concept of pure dance, implied in the dance of Nataraja. Compositions like alarippu, jathiswaram and tillana which provide full scope for nritta and abhinaya have received equal emphasis. In the modern concert of Bharata Natyam, the sequence of items is based on the principle of nritta, nritya and abhinaya.

Carnatic Music is again intimately associated with the culture of the Tamils and South India. One may describe it as the "classical music" of South India. It was, however, traditionally known as Shastiya Sangeetham. Loosely translated it can stand for "scientific" music. While music is generally an art form, the science of the music stresses conformity, discipline and acoustic accuracy. The beauty of Carnatic music is the freedom it allows the artist to improvise. A facet of Carnatic music is Pannisai, the devotional music of the Tamils. It is the traditional music associated with the singing of the sacred hymns in temples and on religious occasions. Natuswaram is the instrumental music of the Tamils. The classical Natuswaram music accompanied by the Thavil is a must for all temple rituals and festivals as well as for ceremonies such as weddings. The veena and yarl are other instruments of the Tamils.

As for the ancient architecture and sculpture, South India may not be able to show buildings of unquestionable antiquity. Nevertheless, it might have possessed them in the hoary past but their disappearance has been due to the perishable nature of the materials used, a destructive hot damp climate and superabundant insect life. Koyil is a pure Tamil word. It conveys the fact that the Tamils built temples themselves and did not borrow the idea. It literally means the "king's house" and indicates the origin and style of the early Tamil temples. According to G.Slater, the earliest extant temples of South India show their indebtedness to a more ancient architectural art and tradition. This must have been worked up through the centuries. Again there is nothing in North India, says G.Slater, equal to the sumptuous greatness and elaboration of the magnificent South Indian temples. The architectural and sculptural splendour of these temples in the South are more voluminous, more extensive and more elaborate than those found in the rest of India. The magnificent and marvellous rock cut temples may have been produced at a later age but they are a natural development of a strictly indigenous art. Again, it is in the south of India, in the Amaravati sculptures for instance, that we find the wonderful decorative charm which pervades Indian art. It must be admitted that the Aryans were indebted to the Dravidians for their knowledge of architecture. As remarked by

Rabindranath Tagore, "the transcendental thought of the Aryans by its marriage with the emotional and creative art of the Dravidian produced the Hindu civilization and culture"<sup>13</sup>.

The religious and cultural heritage of the Saivite Tamils can be graphically represented or captured by one image in the "Dance of Shiva" or the Nataraja icon. It embodies the religion and philosophy, the dance and music, the architecture and sculpture and the art and science of the ancient Tamils. In the words of Ananda K.Coomaraswamy, "The Hindus do not regard religious, aesthetic and scientific standpoints as necessarily conflicting and in all their finest work, whether musical, literary or plastic, these points of view, nowadays so sharply distinguished are inseparably united. This synthesis is nowhere better realised than in the image of Nataraja, "Lord of the Dance", a form of Shiva as Overlord, Ishvara"<sup>14</sup>. Said Albert Einstein, "All my thoughts on the structure of the world and its movements find a clear exposition in the image of Lord Nataraja". Again, Aldous Huxley in his "Siva Dancing in all the Worlds", writes thus: "Nataraja dances in all the worlds at once--in the world of physics and chemistry, in the world of ordinary, all-too-human experience, in the world of Finality, of Suchness, of Mind, of the Clear Light".

From references to Nataraja in the contemporary hymns, we learn the precise significance of the image. In this image Shiva has four arms; his braided locks whirl in the dance. Set in the hair are a cobra, a skull, a mermaid, figure of the Ganges and the crescent moon; in the right ear is a man's earring, in the left a woman's; one hand holds a drum and another fire, while one is raised and the fourth points to the lifted foot. The right foot is pressed upon a dwarf; from the lotus pedestal rises an encircling glory, fringed with flame and touched by the hands holding drum and fire. The image represents Lord Nataraja dancing with his right foot planted on the dwarfish body of the demon of forgetfulness; called Mulayagan in Tamil, it represents ignorance, the destruction of which brings enlightenment, true wisdom and release from the bondage of existence. This foot symbolizes Siva's world creative force driving life-monad into the sphere of matter. The left foot held aloft symbolizes their release. The two feet thus denote the continuous cycle of consciousness into and out of the condition of ignorance.

Lord Nataraja's upper right hand holds an hour-glass shaped drum, symbolizing creation, for sound was the first element to evolve in the unfolding of the

universe. The upper left hand in ardhachandra-mudra ( the half moon pose ) bears a tongue of flame; the element of the final destruction of the universe. The ring of fire surrounding the figure ( called Thiruvasi in Tamil ) symbolizes the dance of nature ( pakriti ) which is the life process of the universe and its creatures. This ring is touched from within by the hands holding the drum and fire, showing a balance of creation and destruction. Siva's lower right hand uplifted in the sign "Do not fear" ( Abhaya mudra ) bestows protection; his lower left hand in the gaja-hasta posture, imitating the outstretched trunk ( hasta ) of an elephant ( gaja ) points to the left foot as the refuge or salvation of the devotee.

The interpretation of the Dance is as follows, again according to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. "In the Night of Brahma, Nature is inert and cannot dance till Shiva wills it: He rises from his stillness and dancing, sends through matter pulsating waves of awakening sound, proceeding from the drum: then Nature also dances, appearing about Him as a glory. Then in the fulness of time, still dancing He destroys all Names and Forms by Fire and there is new rest. Thus Time and the Timelessness are reconciled by the conceptions of phase alternations extending over vast areas of the space and great tracts of time. The orderly dance of the spheres, the perpetual movement of atoms, evolution and involution are conceptions that have at all times recurred to men's minds but to represent them in visible form of Nataraja's Dance is a unique and magnificent achievement of the Indians"<sup>15</sup>.

The dance form is also interpreted as representing the mystic five letters Na Ma Si Va Ya, the sthoola ( gross ) Panchakshara ( five letters ) representing involution of life and Si Va Ya Na Ma , the sookshma ( subtle ) Panchakshara representing evolution of life. Siva as Nataraja—the King of Dancers—is the embodiment and manifestation of the eternal energy and the dance represents His five activities ( Panchakritya ) which are viz:

- 1) Sristi -- Padaithal -- Si ( creation, unfolding, pouring forth )
- 2) Anugraha – Arulal -- Va ( release, salvation, grace )
- 3) Sthiti -- Kaththal -- Ya ( maintenance, preservation, support )
- 4) Samhara – Azhitthal -- Na ( destruction, taking back )
- 5) Thirobhava- Maraithal -- Ma ( veiling, illusion, transcendental essence)

Any exposition of Saiva Siddhananta philosophy will not be complete without an explanation of Nataraja. Nataraja is not a mere murti or form of Siva. His is a visual portrayal of the philosophy of Saiva Siddhanta. The Cosmic Dance of Siva as Nataraja is the panchakritya dance of the five functions. It has the supreme purpose of redeeming the souls from their state of bondage and of giving deliverance and bestowing on them eternal bliss through union with Himself.

Nowhere is this Dance better realised than where it is believed to have been performed in Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu. Chidambaran is derived from the word "Chit Ambaram", meaning the sky permeated by an atmosphere of intelligence and wisdom. Lord Nataraja is believed to have emerged from Sacred space and performed his cosmic dance here. Chidambaran is a temple where kings vied with one another in adding magnificent structures; a temple where emperors have offered worship and helped it to grow to what it is today. The temple stands in the middle of the town and is surrounded by four broad chariot streets. The temple's tall towers have sculptures depicting 108 dance postures of Lord Nataraja. The main image of Nataraja is within a rectangular shrine covered with gold and copper. The Four Vedas, Upanishads, the six branches of knowledge, eighteen Puranas and devotional hymns are identified with one or other parts of the temple symbolising the totality of Indian knowledge. Many inscriptions recorded here give us a clear picture of the endowments and the extension of the mandapams ( halls ) and temples made by the three dynasties namely Pallava, Chola and Pandya.



## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Many writers of Sri Lankan history have erroneously stated that there were no civilization in pre-historic Lanka, no agriculture, trade or industry, no art of writing and culture and no peoples of significance before the coming of the so-called Indo-Aryan tribes and the introduction of Buddhism. As we have seen, despite the many authoritative challenges made to disprove such notions, the historians of the Mahavamsa school in particular persist in such interpretations of history, relying on mytho-historical sources alone like the Chronicles of Lanka. They begin, for instance, the story of man in Lanka with the arrival of the mythical Vijaya and his followers. The early inhabitants of the island like the Rakshasas, Yakshas and Nagas are casually dismissed in their writings as invisible spirits of the underworld or as primitive tribes with little or no civilization. All the available evidence from other sources is conveniently brushed aside. In the case of the Dravidians / Tamils, they are portrayed as intruders and invaders who came after the so-called Indo-Aryan tribes to conquer and destroy the Aryan-Buddhist civilization already in place. Hence the assertion that the Dravidians arrived in the island two centuries or so after the advent of the so-called Aryan tribes. This is repeated against all the known historical facts. As has been clearly shown, Dravidian-speaking settlements and kingdoms existed in the island many, many centuries before the traditionally recorded history of the island begins.

All the bias, prejudice and misrepresentations in the traditional history are due to the fact that some historians and writers continue to rely heavily on the Chronicles of Lanka. As K.M.de Silva remarks, "the Mahavamsa and its continuation the Culavamsa were the work of bhikkus and naturally enough were permeated by a strong religious bias and encrusted with miracle and invention"<sup>1</sup>. While further archaeological excavations and their systematic study are awaited, a more critical examination of the Chronicles is necessary. Furthermore, a recourse to evidence from sources such as epigraphical, archaeological, linguistic, literary, traditional and mythological, both local and foreign now available for historical study is required. These would help provide independent corroboration where necessary. Tapping such resources, a different

and truer picture of the island's early history emerges. It also enables the reconstruction of the early history of the Tamils going back to pre-historic times. It shows the influential role they played in the island's early development as well as the influence of the Tamil kingdoms of South India on the island's early history.

The intention of the authors of the Lankan Chronicles--the Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa--to conveniently begin the story of man in Lanka with the advent of the mythical Vijaya in the first place denies the historical process. Though the Chroniclers casually dismiss the Yakshas and Nagas as peoples with little or no civilization, at other times the treatment of them is seen to be different to suit the circumstances. For instance, we see that the Dipavamsa finds the Yakshas and Nagas as peoples fit to receive the new faith at the time of their conversion to Buddhism during the Buddha's mythical visits. Again, they are accorded a prominent role by both Chronicles when the Mahabodhi (Bo-tree sapling) is received from India and through its passage to the capital, Anuradhapura. But what is often conveniently forgotten is the contribution by the Yakshas and Nagas to the development of the Sinhalas and their culture. As we have shown, the Sinhala people are ethnologically linked to the Yaksha and Naga peoples. The latter have also left their cultural marks and influences on them. Even with the advent of Buddhism, this interaction continued as seen in the large number of Buddha statues with the protective cobrahood of the Nagas, Naga guardstones near dagabas, shrines and ancient tanks. They all tell a story of Naga-Buddhist inter-action and cultural fusion from very early times. Again, further influences relating to ceremonies and customs where one could discern the influences of Yaksha and Naga fertility and fecundity cults, words borrowed from these peoples etc all speak of this contribution. In fact, primitive or old Sinhala grew first from Elu the dialect of these peoples. Such being the historical process and development, any attempt to deny it or construct / implant a dynasty from nowhere as it may seem is totally misleading. Such would be the case if the history of the island begins with the establishment of a kingdom by the mythical Vijaya. As B.C.Law observes, "The abruptness of the establishment of an Indian form of monarchy goes against other historical traditions that sensibly represent it as a final result of an earlier and long process of settlement and colonization"<sup>2</sup>. It is abundantly clear, as has been shown, that there was an earlier and long process of settlement and colonization of the island by the Dravidian speaking peoples.

The further intention of the Lankan Chroniclers to give the first dynasty they sought to implant, a north Indian ancestry goes against all the known historical facts. As B.C.Law remarks, "The Chroniclers who were mad with the idea of the Indo-Aryan rule did not foresee the difficulties to be met by the modern historian"<sup>3</sup>. As has been clearly shown, the legend of Vijaya does not stand up to any historical test. Nor has it been possible from that legend to extract a core of historical truth which would give the Sinhala people a north Indian ancestry. As the Vijaya legend fails, so must fail any attempt to connect the early beginnings of the Sinhala people to a north Indian ancestry. As we have seen, there have been no subsequent waves of colonization by peoples from the northern part of India. As late as the year 1946, A.G.Ranasingha propounded a theory of his own in the Census Report of 1946 that the Madhura referred to in the Mahavamsa was "Madhura in the Southern Madhyadesa of the Pandu kingdom in the basin of the Ganges", from where the brides for Vijaya and his companions came. There were no grounds for putting forward such a view. The Madhura in the north lies some 1500 miles away in inland territory as against the southern Mathurai which is just across on the River Vaikai and not more than 150 miles away from Lanka. Furthermore, the detailed description in the Mahavamsa does not leave any doubt in the minds of its readers that the place referred to is no other than the Mathurai of the Pandyas of South India. But any doubts in this connection can be dispelled by referring to W Geiger's footnote and the University History of Ceylon published in 1959 mentioning that the words "dakshinam Madhuram puram" in the Pali version of the Mahavamsa referred to Madurai, the city in present day Tamilnadu. A further view is also put forward that the Pandus (Pandyans) of southern India were originally a kshatriya (royal or warrior) tribe of Aryans who migrated from Madhyadesa in northern India again without any basis. The Pandyan dynasty only claimed the title of Pandus or Pandavas after the Mahabharata War ; before that their had the title of Maran. The subsequent attempts to connect Vijaya's successor Panduvasa and his companions to northern India and to import brides for them from the Sakya clan has been clearly shown for what they are. They are nothing more than "inventions" to give some credence to the myth of north Indian ancestry. The earlier Chronicle, the Dipavamsa, does not mention the relationship of Panduvasa to Vijaya and it is silent about the territory from which Kaccana, the bride for Panduvasa came. As B.C.Law concludes, "The missing links are ingeniously supplied in the Mahavamsa"<sup>4</sup>. It is evident that the first dynasty established by the historical Vijaya is indeed a Pandyan dynasty as seen.

As for the Dravidians / Tamils, it is stated by some historians and writers, that they arrived in the island a few centuries after the advent of the so-called Indo-Aryan tribes. Again, the portrayal of them is as intruders and invaders arriving after an Indo-Aryan Buddhist civilization was in place only to destroy it. As has been shown both statements are not only false but also tendentious. It has been clearly shown that Dravidian colonization and settlements existed in Lanka from pre-historic times. The archaeological evidence is more than supported from epigraphical and literary sources. S.Paranavitana explicitly stated that the megalithic monuments, urn burials and artefacts in Lanka, belong to the Dravidian speaking people. Again as has been shown, the ethnic name "Dameda" (Tamil) occurs in the Brahmi inscriptions of Lanka. These inscriptions, as has been mentioned, are the earliest recorded evidence available to-date in Lanka. There is thus more than sufficient evidence available to prove the presence of Tamil people in Lanka from pre-historic times. Sir William Jones is of opinion that the Island was "beyond time of memory" inhabited by the Hindu race; and he refers to the "languages, letters and old monuments of its various inhabitants" in support of it. Bertolacci and Bennet in their accounts of Ceylon enumerate several facts which tend to show that the Tamils of India knew and colonized Ceylon long anterior to the Vijayan conquest. The references to Lanka in the Ramayana and Mahabharata favour the same view. Thus any attempt by some historians and writers to maintain that the Dravidians arrived two centuries or so after the so-called Indo-Aryan tribes is without any basis or foundation. Nor can one plead the lack of evidence to deny the presence of Dravidian settlements from pre-historic times.

The further attempt to view the early Dravidians in Lanka only as intruders and invaders is again completely without any basis. As has been clearly stated in the University History of Ceylon, "the early settlers came from there (the sub-continent) bringing with them arts, crafts and culture to their new home"<sup>5</sup>. This reference can hardly relate to the early pre-Dravidian jungle tribes who were at a primitive stage of development when they crossed over into Lanka. It obviously has particular reference to the early Dravidian speaking people who came with their arts, crafts and culture in pre-historic times. They thus came as peaceful immigrants, agriculturists and traders. Again, as the Dravidian speaking people gained mastery over the South Indian kingdoms, they began to influence the course of the island's history. As Sinha and Bannerjee observed, "The Dravidians in pre-historic times navigated the seas in pursuit of trade and commerce"<sup>6</sup>. There thus followed the early trading settlements of the Dravidian

people in the island. As B.C. Law remarks, "the coming of the merchants and traders from India is a fact which is borne out by some of the ancient inscriptions of Ceylon". Paul.E.Peiris, as we have seen, explicitly stated that the five isvarams close to the seaport towns in ancient Lanka were meant to cater to the religious wants of a wealthy mercantile population. Among the other peaceful immigrants were the pearl divers and chank cutters settling around the pearl fisheries of the island.

More importantly were the agriculturists and artisans who came earlier. We have seen that the north-western coast was dotted with the ruins of ancient tanks, built by the early Dravidian settlers. So too the Giant's Tank said to be built by the Nagas, another Dravidian speaking people in pre-historic times. The Pandyan brides for Vijaya and his companions were accompanied by a thousand families from the eighteen guilds from Pandya. These artisans no doubt helped Vijaya build his capital city, Tamana-nuwara. Again, when Pandukabhaya built Anuradhapura into a fine and prosperous city, he used these artisans and got down more. In fact, the new city was built following faithfully the Indian system of town planning and town administration. His chief engineer was a brahmin by the name of Jotiya. The early Tamil agriculturists who came to the region with Vijaya's Tamil bride and those during the time of his successors were also responsible for the introduction of rice cultivation and the irrigation system. As P Arunachalam observed, "Tamil colonies of agriculturists and artificers were imported in large numbers and rice and other cultivation introduced. Irrigation works were constructed. In order to secure the organised and continuous labour necessary for their maintenance, the patriarchal village system which still survives in a modified form under the name "Gansabhawa" was introduced".

There were thus well established Dravidian settlements in the island long before the first attempts were made by Tamil princes / adventurers from South India to capture the Anuradhapura throne. As we have seen, the first instance was when two horse-traders, Senan and Guttikan, seized the throne in 177 BC and ruled jointly and justly for a period of twenty-two years (177-155 BC). But the most significant capture of the throne of Anuradhapura was that by the Chola prince Elalan (Elara). The fact that he ruled for a long period of forty-four years (145-101 BC), also shows that there already was a predominantly large Tamil population by this time. As the Mahavamsa itself states, Duthagamani had to overcome thirty-two Tamil rulers of principalities before he could take on Elalan. This clearly indicates the large and widespread presence of Tamils in the

country at this time. The instances of capture of the Anuradhapura throne by Tamils from South India thereafter were few and far between. After Elalan (145-101 BC), it was in 44 BC during the reign of Valagam Bahu when five Pandyan chiefs seized the throne and jointly ruled the kingdom for twenty-five years (44-29 BC). Thereafter it was only in 430 AD, after over 450 years, when seven Pandyans seized the throne and ruled together for twenty-five years (430-455) before the reign of King Dhatusena (455-473 AD). More significantly though during this early Anuradhapura period was the growth of Tamil influence in the Court of the Anuradhapura kingdom through the marriage alliances of the Naga kingdom in the north-west with the Pandyan dynasty in Anuradhapura and the rise of the Lambakkans, a mixed Tamil and Naga dynasty, to the throne. As we have seen, several kings who came to the throne bore Naga or Tamil names. There is reason to believe, as seen earlier, that the lion which became the emblem of the ruling dynasty too came from the standard of the Naga dynasty.

As for the soldiers who came with the invading armies, many of them no doubt settled in the island. But most of the soldiers who came were those who arrived in the later Anuradhapura period and they were essentially recruited as mercenaries by Sinhala kings to fight their succession disputes. Thus Ilanaga (33-43), Abhayanaga (231-240), Jetthatissa II (328-337), Aggabodhi III (628), Dathopatissa II (659-667) and Manavamma (684-718) all sought the assistance of South Indian allies and mercenaries to secure their thrones. Again some soldiers were brought as prisoners of war and settled in the country. What is clear from this account is that from pre-historic times Dravidians and Tamils had occupied the island and they came essentially as peaceful immigrants—colonists and settlers, merchants and traders, pearl divers and chank cutters, agriculturists and artisans, adventurers and seekers of fortune, soldiers and mercenaries. As C.Brito observed the Pandyan princess, her companions, retinue and the 1000 families from the eighteen guilds would have swelled the number of the Tamil colonists to at least twenty times that of the so-called settlers from northern India. And it must be borne in mind, that the way once made for these colonists was kept open by a communication which Vijaya maintained during the thirty-eight years of his rule. In his words, "Such a communication could not have failed to lead to a continual influx of Tamils from the mainland in his (Vijaya's) and succeeding reigns".

It is clear that a deeper study needs to be made of Lanka = Ilankai's prehistoric past in any reconstruction of the early history of its peoples. A fresh look is

necessary at the historical process of ethnic settlements and formations in studying the peopling of the island and the place of the Tamils in it. This calls for the recovery of the material remains of the prehistoric and proto-historic periods by archaeological excavations. The further investigation of epigraphic, linguistic, ethnological and other evidence by acceptable modern methods, with corroborative materials from South India can also lead us to a better understanding of the actual historical developments. An area of increasing importance in contemporary archaeological interests concerns the megalithic culture complexes which have been found in many parts of the island. There is a high degree of concentration of them in the northern and eastern dry zone. It seems clear now that this megalithic culture is associated with the use or even introduction of iron, with fairly advanced forms of pottery, with agriculture and irrigation based settlement. It is seen that there are definite links between the megalithic peoples, the early Brahmi inscriptions and the village irrigation works. Such a study will also provide us with insights into the relationship between Lanka and southern India where the largest concentration of Indian megalithic sites is to be found. An equally significant connection is that the material culture of the prehistoric and early historic periods as well as other non-material phenomena show clear relationships between Lanka and southern India. As S Goonatilleke says, "the physical basis for early Sri Lankan culture was in the village tanks associated with this South Indian megalithic culture"<sup>10</sup>. Again the transition from the prehistoric / proto-historic to the historic is marked by the appearance of Brahmi inscriptions (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC to 1<sup>st</sup> century AD). These are also found in South India. As this megalithic culture of the early Dravidian Tamils precedes by many centuries the so-called advent of Vijaya, it clearly establishes the widespread presence of Tamil settlements in the island from prehistoric times.

As far as Lanka is concerned, the earliest kingdom of Dravidian speaking people known to have existed according to the Ramayana and Indian tradition is that of King Ravana. The author of the Ramayana describes in detail the metropolis of Ravana's kingdom--Lankapuri. If tradition is living truth, as seen in the place names associated with the Ramayana which have come down to us, then there is no reason to doubt aspects of its historicity. As C.S.Navaratnam observed the Ramayana contains a core of historical truth. Faced with the historicity of the Ravana personage, some Sinhala writers now seek to begin the history of Lanka with Ravana but regard him as a non-Dravidian. Such claims that Ravana was not a dravidian can be summarily dismissed, given the ample evidence from

Indian sources. Again as Tamil tradition has it, about 1500 BC, a Tamil queen by the name of Alli Arasani ruled in the north-west region of the island. She is said to have had an amour with Arjuna, the hero of the Mahabharata when he visited Lanka on a pilgrimage after the war. There is unmistakable evidence that this region was peopled by Tamils from very early times. The archaeological finds unearthed here show that the burial urns and artefacts from a megalithic age belonged to the Dravidian speaking people. This region subsequently thrived through trade, fisheries particularly pearl fisheries and agriculture. The place names as well as the ruins of tanks and Hindu temples bear witness to this. Equally, worthy of mention about this time were the Tamil principalities in south-east Lanka. They were ruled by Pandyan princes and chieftains as seen from the Pandyan emblem of the fish. They are referred to in early Tamil Sangam literature as well as in the third century BC cave inscriptions as Izham (Elam). Lastly, survival of place names is generally a good indicator of the linguistic pre-history of a region. There are several place names in all parts of the island with good Tamil etymologies.

Following the submergence of Ravana's kingdom in a deluge, we come to the principalities and kingdoms of the Yakshas and Nagas ( Dravidian peoples) which survived into the period of recorded history. According to C.Rasanayagam, "the Naga and the Yakkha kingdoms were the seats of well ordered and well organised monarchical governments dating as far back as, or even earlier than, the period of the Ramayana"<sup>11</sup>. These as seen have also been referred to in the Pali Chronicles. Special mention needs to be made of the Naga kingdoms and in particular to the northern kingdom of Nagadipa ( Jaffna Peninsula ). It was earlier referred to as Cheran-tivu, the island of the Cheras or Seras, a hill tribe from South India and known to be serpent worshippers. Hence in later times, they came to be called as Nagas by Sanskrit and Buddhist writers and Cheran-tivu came to be referred to as Nakativu or Nagadipa--the island of the Nagas. According to C.Rasanayagam, this Naga kingdom is an ancient one and has existed from early times right up to the 3rd century AD. What all these kingdoms and principalities show is that the island was occupied by Dravidian speaking peoples from pre-historic times.

The Mahavamsa which begins the recorded history of Lanka with the advent of the mythical Vijaya relates how the blood of Vijaya's descendants was diluted not once but twice; firstly in fathering Kuveni's children and subsequently marrying a Pandyan princess. Taking the legend at its face value, where Vijaya's

700 companions also took Pandyan wives, it is hard to believe that the Sinhalese of today were all descendants of these people. Any attempt to give a north Indian ancestry to the Sinhalese on such a flimsy basis is to say the least extremely far-fetched. But as has been clearly shown, the legend is all a myth deduced from the Jataka tales by the Chroniclers to explain the term Sinhala. On the otherhand the historical Vijaya seems to be no other than a Dravidian merchant prince or adventurer. There can be no doubt that he was a Hindu as Tamil tradition has it that he built several Hindu temples. Besides Buddhism had not yet been brought to the island. As Vijaya had no issue by his Pandyan wife, Panduvasa who succeeded him was as seen his wife's nephew. As B.C.Law says, "the true significance of the Dipavamsa name Panduvasa is still a matter of speculation---it may well be a Pali or Prakrit equivalent of Pandayavarsa meaning one from the Pandyan country, ie a Pandya by nationality. The name Panduka is apparently of the same import"<sup>12</sup>. Hence Panduvasa and Abhaya who followed Vijaya were full blooded Pandyans. Abhaya's successor was Pandukabhaya, who had a combination of the names of Panduvasa and Abhaya. He strengthened his position on the throne with the help of local leaders such as Cittarajah, a Naga and Kharavela, a Yaksha. He gave his son a Tamil Saiva name--Mutusiva, who was the father of King Devanampiya Tissa. Thus it is evidently clear that the first dynasty of kings on the Anuradhapura throne was Tamil and Hindu. Mutusiva, in fact, married a Naga princess from Nagadipa and from whence begins the Naga connection to the royal line of Anuradhapura. As we have seen, the historical Vijaya paid a yearly tribute to the Pandyan king throughout the thirty-eight years of his rule. His immediate successors were Pandyans who maintained close relations with the Pandyan kingdom on the mainland. There was a constant flow of Tamils from over there. As E.H.Warmington concludes, "it follows that Ceylon in fact was under Tamil control from the very beginning of recorded history"<sup>13</sup>.

From pre-historic times, early society in Lanka was composed of Dravidian speaking peoples. The earliest strata of Lankan society consisted of various tribes, social and caste groups such as Dameda ( Tamil ), Kabojhiyas, Pulayas, Miridis, Velir (Velala), Brahmanas etc. These groups were under local leaders called "perumakans" ( chiefs ). Words such as raja, maharaja, rajaraja and siva were used in inscriptions. It is evident from inscriptions at sites distributed over a wide area that at the beginning of historical times there were several petty rulers holding sway over various parts of the island. Of these rulers, those at Anuradhapura were pre-eminent. But as pointed out by R.A.H.L. Gunawardene,

even though Devanampiya-tissa assumed the title of maharaja, there is no evidence to show that the other rulers acknowledged his suzerainty. This was also the position at the time when Duthagamani began his campaign to unify the northern region under him. As referred to earlier, the Mahavamsa itself mentions that Duthagamani had to overcome the Tamil rulers of thirty-two principalities before he could take on Elara. The assertion that Lanka was a unified whole in ancient times does not derive from its history.

The word Sinhala as pointed out earlier does not occur in any of the Brahmi inscriptions. S.Paranavitana's explanation that "this name does not occur at all in them ( inscriptions ), for the good reason that as almost everyone in the land was Sinhalese"<sup>14</sup>is to say the least fanciful guesswork. The attempt to give the term Sinhala a totemistic origin is also without any basis. The Mahavamsa mentions Lambakanna, Moriya, Tarachcha, Bahbojaka and Kulina but not Sinhala as a group or clan. It is thus clear that the term Sinhala was not in usage during the period of the Brahmi inscriptions to refer to the island or any of its people. As was pointed out earlier, it only came into use and gained currency after the 5-6th century AD. On the otherhand, there are Brahmi inscriptions, as mentioned, where the ethnic name "Dameda" ( Tamil ) occurs in the inscriptions of Lanka. The fact that this ethnic name was used in these inscriptions proves that by the 3rd century BC, the Tamil people already had a distinct ethnic and separate identity in the southern regions of India and Lanka. These show that society in pre-historic and early historic times in Lanka consisted essentially of Dravidian speaking peoples and that the Tamils amongst them played an influential role given their position in Lanka and South India.

The advent of Buddhism to Lanka during the reign of Devanampiya Tissa (247-207 BC), as stated earlier is certainly a defining moment in the island's history. It soon spread to become the dominant religion. But there is no independent corroboration to the account given in the Mahavamsa regarding the manner of the King's conversion. Again there is no historical record in North India of any children of Asoka with the names of Mahinda and Sanghamitta. As pointed out, the Indian tradition is that Buddhist missionaries led by Mahendra, a brother of Asoka penetrated as far as the Tamraparni river in South India. There is evidence too that a Mahinda carried out missionary work in Malayakuta in South India. It is more probable that either Mahendra or this Mahinda arrived in Lanka from South India than the Mahavamsa account that the Emperor's son Mahinda flew through the air to reach Lanka. As pointed out, by T.R.Shesha Iyengar, it is thus

most likely that the Asokan missionaries initially went to Lanka via South India. This is not surprising as Buddhism had been taken to South India before its official coming to Lanka and it had claimed several adherents to its fold among the Tamil people in South India. Inscriptions of the earliest period and literary works from the first century AD show that Buddhism made strong inroads amongst the Tamil people. As has been pointed out earlier, prominent monks such as Buddhamitta, Buddhaghosa, Buddhadatta, Bodhidharma and Dhammapala were Tamils. There were close intellectual, religious and cultural contacts in early times between the Theravada centres of Lanka and those of South India such as Kanchipuram, Kaviripaddinam, Mathurai and Nagapattinam.

Early society in Lanka before the emergence of a Sinhala polity was essentially Dravidian speaking, the early converts, apart from the Yakshas and Nagas were Tamils. This gave rise to the growing number of Tamil Buddhists amongst the Tamils. Even King Devanampiya Tissa could only have been a Tamil and a Hindu, as the son of King Mutusiva before his conversion. But Buddhists and Hindus lived side by side and there were no divisions amongst the peoples on this score. Ethnicity was not a point of division in Lankan society during this period and a Sinhala polity was yet to emerge. Again during the few centuries before and after the Christian era Hinduism and Buddhism flourished side by side both in South India and Lanka.. They were seen as different sects rather than as rival religions. Hence they were both supported by the kings and the people in Lanka as well as in India. Even though Asoka is spoken of as a Buddhist Emperor, this is a misreading of history. In the view of the people of the day, he was a Hindu monarch following one of the recognised sects. His own inscriptions setting out the Dharma contained elements of Hinduism and Buddhism. In the words of K.M.Panikkar, "The idea that Asoka was a kind of Buddhist Constantine declaring himself against paganism is a complete misreading of Indian conditions through the eyes of Christian Europe. Asoka was essentially a Hindu as indeed was the founder of the sect which he professed"<sup>15</sup>. The exclusiveness of religious doctrines is a Semitic conception and is alien to the East. Even today for instance, Buddhists in China and Japan are both Buddhists and Taoists in China and Buddhists and Shintoists in Japan. In Sri Lanka too, the ordinary Buddhist people have no difficulty in being Buddhists and Hindus, praying to Hindu gods at the same time.

The term Sinhala is conspicuous by its absence in the Brahmi inscriptions which are accepted as the earliest historical records of Lanka. It only came into currency in the 4-6th century AD. The word Sinhala itself occurs for the first time in Lankan sources in the Dipavamsa, where it is said the island was known as Sinhala on account of the lion. The expression Sinhaladwipa (island of the Sinhalas ) occurs in a text by Buddhaghosa during the 5th century. The Mahavamsa written in the 6th century mentions the word Sinhala only twice. This being so, there could not have been a separate Sinhala identity during the Elalan-Duthagamani war (118-101BC). In the first place, as B.C.Law observes, "no inscription is found until now to confirm the truth of the battles fought by Duthagamani with Elara and his lieutenants"<sup>16</sup>. The Dipavamsa only makes a passing reference to a war between Elara and Duthagamani. But as stated earlier, the author of the Mahavamsa makes the Duthagamani-Elara war the centre-piece of his Chronicle and portrays it as an ethnic and religious conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. As has been rightly observed by K.M.de Silva, this has been done by "glossing over the facts and events which were inconvenient to the author's prime consideration of immortalising his hero-Duthagamani"<sup>17</sup>. One thing is clear, as remarked by Dr S.J.Thambiah that "a primordial golden age with a perfect fit between Sinhala people, Sinhala language, Buddhism and the entire territorial space of the island could not have existed in Duthagamani's time and probably did not exist at the time the Mahavamsa was composed"<sup>18</sup>. Such being the case, one can only say that the beginnings of a separate Sinhala identity were first seen and articulated from the 5-6th centuries. If one considers that the Sinhala language only came into its own in the 12th century, one can agree with R.A.L.H. Gunawardene who comes to the conclusion that "it is only about the 12th century that a Sinhala grouping could have been considered identical with the linguistic grouping. The relationship between Sinhala and Buddhist identities was even more complex"<sup>19</sup>.

The growth of a Sinhala polity was the result of a gradual process of aggregation and incorporation of other settlements and categories of Dravidian peoples not unrelated to them. Again, it is by virtue of a linguistic incorporation and not by descent that they would have become Sinhala. In short, the historical process of Sinhalization of the peoples has been a continuous one through the centuries in Lankan history. All the evidence available leads one to the irresistible conclusion that the Sinhalas emerged as a result of the ascriptive cleavage consequent on the spread of Buddhism and the Sinhala language. The Sinhalas then in terms of their origin are not an Aryan people as popularly claimed but Dravidian/Tamil

people. As C Brito observed, "So that in an ethnological point of view the Sinhalese are but a branch of the Tamil race"<sup>20</sup>. Even the historian Dr G.C.Mendis was left in doubt when he stated thus: " it is not possible to state whether they (Sinhalese) were Aryan by blood or whether they were a non-Aryan people who had adopted an Aryan dialect as their language"<sup>21</sup>. Considering all the evidence, it is not at all surprising that a layman D. Amarasiri Weeraratne writing to the Sunday Island newspaper of 30/10/99 makes the following frank admission:

"The original Sinhalese who came from India were Hindus. They became Buddhists during the time of King Devanampiyatissa. The Salagama, Durawa and Karawa peoples in the annals of their castes published in book form frankly admit that they came and settled here from South India. In fact Sinhala names, vocabulary, customs, rites and ceremonies etc confirm this. Our new year and national dress is that of the Tamils. Our names such as Appuhamy, Bandara, ---kone, ---peruma, ---aratchy etc are of Tamil origin. Our caste system is that of South India and not taken from North India. Our gods are taken from the Hindu pantheon of the Tamils. All these point to the fact that Sinhalese Buddhism is an admixture of Buddhism and Hinduism of South India".

By the 4th century AD, the Buddhist Sangha ( priesthood ) came to exist as a seat of learning and its members benefited from the lands and other endowments bestowed on the viharas ( temples ). The monks saw it in their interests to rally the king and the established order which protected the religion. By the time the Mahavamsa came to be composed in the 6th century AD, the monks came to take sides in the sectarian rivalries and the open hostilities towards the Tamils. Furthermore, the Hindu resurgence and revival in South India by the crusading Saiva and Vaishnava saints, particularly from the 6th century onwards saw Buddhism and Jainism beat a retreat on the sub-continent. The strong comeback of Hinduism in South India saw the undoing of the evangelical gains made by Buddhism following the work of the Asokan missionaries. These developments had their repercussions in the island. As observed by S.Pathmanathan, Tamils who came from South India following the Hindu revival retained their Hindu identity. In his words,"they were not easily absorbed into the Buddhist Sinhalese population as before"<sup>22</sup>.

The author of the Mahavamsa may naturally have perceived a threat to Buddhism in the island and to their vested interests. In mirroring these

developments of the 6th century AD, the author of the Mahavamsa viewed past developments too in a similar light. In particular, the politically motivated author of the Mahavamsa produced almost an epic on Duthagamani basing his narrative on legends and myths. As a result, the epic of the Duthagamani-Elara battle became a major theme in the ancient traditional history of the island. It has profoundly influenced historical thinking in Lanka both in ancient and modern times. Consequently, Tamil-Sinhala relations came to be viewed passionately as one of perpetual conflict and confrontation. According to S.Pathmanathan, "such a view is based on selected readings from traditional history and it ignores much of the historical and archaeological evidence that weighs against it"<sup>23</sup>. Besides the Mahavamsa was written recounting events up to a thousand years in retrospect and is not a contemporaneous record. Some scholars believe it was composed later than in the 6th century AD. And as B.C.Law observed, " like all the chronicles, the Dipavamsa and the Mahavamsa contain germs of historical truths buried under the mesh of absurd fables and marvellous tales "<sup>24</sup>.

Despite the clear evidence that Duthagamani and Elara were participants in a feudal power game and not in a racial war fought between Sinhalese and Tamils, many historians and scholars and text-book writers in particular have continued to treat this episode based on what is said in the Mahavamsa. None of them has viewed the Duthagamani-Elara saga outside the racial or religious framework within which it was set by the Chronicle. Hence due to an over-reliance on mytho-historical sources in particular on the Chronicles of Lanka, the early traditional history of the island has been interpreted and seen in a biased and distorted way. There were conflicts between Lankan kings and invading Tamil armies from South India from time to time. As a matter of fact, such instances were few and far between as we have seen. At the same time assistance has been sought on occasions by Lankan kings from South Indian kings or armies raised over there and brought here to fight their succession disputes. Again Lankan kings have gone to the assistance of South Indian kings in battles against the latter's Tamil foes. These wars have to be seen in the context of their times, as rival feudal kingdoms seeking to establish their supremacy one over the other or repel the foreign invader. As has been pointed out, in the rush to sing the praises of Duthagamani, it was forgotten that there were many Tamil Buddhists on Duthagamani's side just as there were many Buddhists on Elara's side. And as S.J. Thambiah would have it, there was no perfect fit between Buddhism, the Sinhala people and the Sinhala language at this time in history. Certainly ethnicity or race was hardly in the fore. For as has been pointed out, it has been

a feature of Lankan history that its kings were readily accepted even though they may have come from Pandya, Naga, Chola, Kalinga or Nayakar dynasties except when they came as invaders. Again, a number of queens of Lanka were from South India. Even as late as 1739 when the Kandyan throne fell vacant, the Kandyan nobles enthroned a Tamil Nayakar king of South India even though a Sinhala heir was present because they preferred a "kshatriya" king to a "radala" monarch ( C.Wickremasekera ). The obvious prerequisite for kingship was caste not race. The other prerequisite was Buddhism and succeeding kings took great care to patronise Buddhist institutions and observe Buddhist rituals. The line of demarcation between Tamil and Sinhala ethnic consciousness amongst the ruling classes was certainly blurred. How much so it must have been in ancient times.

In the unfolding of the early history of the island, what emerges as mainstream development is the evolution of Tamil and Sinhala identities from a common ethnic and cultural stratum in the distant past. As we have seen, differences in religion, language and ways of life emerged making for distinct and separate identities. The Tamils who entered the island from pre-historic times, as seen, retained their separate identity as Tamil and Hindu, though they absorbed the other Dravidian peoples such as the Nagas and the Yakshas. The Sinhalas emerged from the early Dravidian settlers of the island with Indian Buddhism and the Sinhala language as the constitutive elements of their ethnicity. But ethnicity was not in the fore during the early period. Nor was religion a point of division during that period as we have seen, for Hinduism and Buddhism existed side by side in South India and Lanka and there were many Buddhists among the Tamils as well. With the revival and resurgence of Hinduism under the crusading evangelism of the Saiva Archryas in particular, the gains made by the Asokan missionaries for Buddhism in South India and North-East Lanka were reversed as these peoples returned to the fold. Increasingly from the sixth century onwards Buddhism and Jainism, the non-theistic religions in South India were repudiated; the cult of Bakti ( Devotion) was emphasised by the Hindu Reformers and religion with the worship of personal gods, rituals and images brought to the people. Buddhism and Jainism beat a retreat in South India and gradually disappeared. Likewise as we have seen in north-east Lanka too the work of the Saivite saints was deeply felt. The ancient Siva temples such as Thiruketeeswaram and Tirukoneswaram in the north-west and north-east of the island respectively were sanctified in their hymns. A consequence of this as pointed out was that the religio-social link between the Tamils in South India and N-E Lanka with the Sinhalese in the rest of the island was severed. The

Tamils in the island stressed their religion and language, Hinduism and Tamil, expressing their ethnicity in those terms. The Sinhalese came to be counted as Buddhists and Sinhala-speaking with their language now coming into its own. Again the Tamils came to occupy the north-east parts of the island , making it a predominantly Tamil region ; while the Sinhalese came into their own in the rest of the country absorbing the peoples there. There were nevertheless long periods of social harmony between the Tamils and the Sinhalese and religious and cultural ties during this ancient period. But what resulted as pointed out by K.M.de Silva was the emergence of a plural society in which two distinct groups of people lived side by side. This resulting religio-cultural and ethnic pluralism needs to be recognised and acknowledged without over-riding or damaging its separate identities. Despite a shared history and common ethnic and cultural origins, subsequent developments have only served to underline these separate identities making it clear that the Tamils and Sinhalese in the island need to co-exist under state structures which recognise this pluralism. The early history of the island clearly shows that the country was never an unified whole but consisted of kingdoms and principalities ruled by kings and petty rulers. As seen, it was one where the separate identities of the Tamils and Sinhalas not only emerged and developed but also took root in particular core regions. They have met, at times fought, coalesced and more often co-existed with each other in shifting patterns over these centuries.



## APPENDIX 1

### NOTE ON INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ISLAND'S ANCIENT PAST

Three hypotheses can be discerned in the interpretations given to Lanka's=Ilankai's ancient past in standard historical writings. In interpreting the past, an attempt is made in such writings to trace the growth of human settlements and the process of ethnic formations in the island. Essentially this relates to the two main ethnic groups in the country viz the Tamils and the Sinhalese who had occupied the island for more than 2500 years. The minorities such as the Moors who first came to the island as traders and later as settlers belong to the medieval period, from the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The other minorities such as the Burghers, Malays and the Indian Tamils belong to the modern period, having come or were brought there during the period of European occupation of the island. Hence the ancient history of Lanka=Ilankai deals exclusively with the Tamil and Sinhala peoples, their colonisation and settlements, ethnic formations and identities.

The first hypothesis may be referred to as that of the Mahavamsa School as it is based on the ancient Pali Chronicles of the island – the Dipavamsa and the Mahavamsa. They begin the story of the island with the arrival of the mythical Vijaya and his 700 companions and Vijaya's establishment of a kingdom. The early inhabitants of the island are dismissed as demons and spirits and are not to be regarded as human beings. Hence the story of man in the island begins with the new arrivals led by Vijaya who are referred to as having come from Lala in northern India. The early South Indian or Dravidian / Tamil colonists figure at best as alien invaders and intruders bent on destroying a Buddhist civilisation already in place. Hence the assertion that the latter arrived in the island two or three centuries after the so-called arrival of the north Indian settlers. Despite the myth of origin in this tale of Vijaya, there is popular and semi-scholarly acceptance of the Vijaya story by the Sinhalese. Again, this is the history taught in schools and figures almost exclusively in standard textbooks. It has led to the growth of a Sinhala consciousness expressed today in the concept that Sri Lanka is the land of the Sinhala people of Aryan descent, though this does not really

derive from the island's history. It is also a myth used to legitimise the claims of the Sinhalas, as the original inhabitants of the island.

The second hypothesis is the one now most favoured by modern historians. While agreeing that the story of Vijaya is purely legendary, a myth of origin deduced from early Indian legends by the Chroniclers, they still make the basic premise, without any validating historical evidence, that the first (Sinhala) settlers came from places in the north-east and north-west of India. There is no evidence of any large scale migration of peoples from north India; nor is there any archaeological evidence to connect the early peoples in the island to the north-west or north-east of India. What little evidence offered is meant to show that the proto-Sinhala language of the early inscriptions belonged to the broad group of North Indian prakrits. However, other linguistic studies more convincingly indicate that the Sinhala language in its early evolution though displaying some affinity was distinct from the Indian prakrits as it was profoundly influenced by the Dravidian languages. Notwithstanding the lack of any evidence, the primacy of the role of the so-called colonists from north India is assumed in the dry zone tank civilisation that was established. Again, without any concrete evidence, an assertion is made that the predominant ethnic element in the Sinhala polity of today is Aryan or north Indian.

A somewhat minor role is begrudgingly accorded to the South Indian or Dravidian / Tamil elements without basically questioning the primacy accorded to the north Indian settlers. While it is conceded that the Dravidians had contributed to the ethnic formation and culture of the Sinhalas, that component is said to be minimal. From this position is also deduced that the Sinhalas were the only mainstream people in the ancient period. The history of the island is thus mainly seen as the history of the Sinhala people.

The third hypothesis which is not featured in standard writings is that the original settlers were the Dravidian tribes and peoples, notwithstanding the earlier presence of some Vedic / Austroloid nomadic tribes. The latter were essentially the wandering food-gatherer type of people. Hence a settled type of existence came with the Dravidian / Tamil peoples. The Dravidian peoples, such as the Rakshasas, Yakshas and Nagas were in well established communities with their principalities and kingdoms. In the case of the Tamils, the presence of their settlements is clearly discerned from the discovery of megalithic culture complexes in many parts of the island with a high degree of concentration of

them in the northern and eastern dry zone of the country. They belong to the island's pre-historic past. Again, they are seen as an overflow from South India which establishes the fact that the earliest peoples to occupy the island came from neighbouring South India. The definite links seen between these megalithic peoples, the Brahmi inscriptions and the village irrigation works further establishes the fact that the beginnings of civilisation in the island arose from this Dravidian / Tamil ethnic and cultural base. Also society before the advent of Buddhism (circa 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) was Dravidian and Tamil and essentially Hindu. Hence it was homogeneous. The subsequent cleavage in society into Tamil / Hindu and Sinhala / Buddhist segments was a later development with the advent of Buddhism and the growth of the Sinhala language. This early past is also evident in the Sinhala peoples of today. They differ not ethnically but only culturally, in religion, language and ways of life from the Tamils. This is also the view of anthropologists and sociologists. In otherwords, it is the historically acquired traits that have set the Tamils and the Sinhalas apart, making for their separate identities. Thus the early history of the island is seen as one where two separate identities have taken root in particular core regions. They have met, at times fought, coalesced and more often co-existed with each other in shifting patterns over the centuries. It is this third hypothesis that the author seeks to establish with historical evidence.



## APPENDIX 11

### THE DEMISE OF THE ARYAN RACE / INVASION THEORIES ?

This postscript has great relevance to the subject-matter of this book. Though it relates to the Indus Valley Civilization, the new evidence being uncovered from the excavation sites seeks to challenge the very basis of India's historical evolution. Consequently it has implications for Lanka's early traditional history as well. For what is contested is not only the discredited Aryan race theory but more importantly the Aryan Invasion of India theory. If it is proven that the Aryans did not invade India, as was supposed, then there is no Aryan basis to India's ancient civilization and culture. India's historical evolution has been an indigenous development all along. The new evidence and the conclusions drawn therefrom have therefore tremendous significance. They change the whole conception of India's historical evolution and its glorious ancient heritage. There will be a need, in the first instance, to re-examine the basis of India's ancient history.

A flurry of excavations in the Indus Valley sites on both sides of the Indo-Pakistan border has uncovered new evidence which challenges some accepted notions about the Indus Valley Civilization. What is primarily contested are the Aryan Race and Aryan Invasion of India theories as wrong. In the last couple of decades, new evidence has emerged from these sites. Among them are the discovery of the lost track of the Rigvedic river Saraswati, a chain of sites all along this lost track, the discovery of archaeological remains of Vedis (altars) and Yugas connected with Vedic Yajnas (ceremonial sacrifices), the discovery of the lost city of Dwarka beneath the sea near Gujarat and its similarity to the Indus Valley Civilization. Arising from these findings are the views now being put forward by some archaeologists and scholars that the end of the Indus Valley Civilization was not due to the Aryan invaders of India, of which there is little evidence, but was the result of drastic climatic change. At the same time, there is a new approach to the decipherment of the Indus Valley script as the original Sanskrit; ie that Sanskrit is no longer regarded as the language introduced by the Aryans. There is also the view that the culture of the Indus Valley Civilization is a natural and continuous development of earlier cultures which peaked as the greatest urban civilization of the ancient period . The issues thus are more than

of ordinary academic interest. They demand a re-examination of the entire range of the Aryan Race and Invasion theories.

As was seen earlier, the origin of these theories is traced to the German Indologist Max Mueller in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He popularized the idea of a pure Aryan race. When challenged by his peers that nowhere in the Vedic literature the term Aryan stood for a racial group, he hurriedly recanted and stated, "I hereby declare again and again that if I say Aryan, I mean neither blood nor bones, nor hair, nor skull. I mean simply those who speak an Aryan language---to me an ethnologist who speaks of Aryan race, Aryan blood, Aryan eyes and hair is as great a sinner as a linguist who speaks of a dolichocephalic dictionary or a brachycephalic grammar". (Max Mueller, "Biographies of Words and the Home of the Aryas 1888 p 120".) But the damage was done. The European and German nationalist groups in particular exploited this idea to propagate the supremacy of an assumed Aryan race of white people. Hitler carried it to its absurd extremities for his political hegemony and pogrom of the Jews and other societies. It culminated in the holocaust of millions of innocent people. As for the Aryan Invasion of India theory, it is held that northern India was invaded and conquered by a nomadic, light-skinned race of people called "Aryans". They descended from Central Asia or some unknown land between 1900-1500 BC and destroyed an advanced civilization of people in the Indus Valley imposing upon them their (Aryan) language and culture.

In Vedic literature, the word "Arya", it is now said, is nowhere defined in terms of either race or language. Instead it refers to a gentleman, good-natured person, righteous person, nobleman etc. Thus in the Ramayana, Valmiki describes Rama as an "arya" meaning one who cared for the equality of all and was dear to everyone. Etymologically, (according to V.S. Apte's Sanskrit-English dictionary), to the root "r" a prefix "a" is appended to give a negative meaning. The meaning of "arya" is thus given as best, excellent, worthy, honourable etc. Thus neither in the Vedic Scriptures, nor by tradition nor etymologically does the word "arya" denote race or language. According to ethnologists, there are only four primary races viz. Negroid, Australoid, Caucasian and Mongoloid. Both the so-called Aryans of northern India and the Dravidians of southern India belong to the Caucasian type and are placed in the same Mediterranean sub-branch. The darker and smaller-made southern Indians are explained, as we have seen, as being the result of a greater exposure to the sun, living as they do closer to the equator and some intermingling with the Negroid/Australoid peoples who had

earlier occupied India. According to a Study by internationally reputed scientists ("The History and Geography of Human Genes" by Luca Cavalli-Sforza, Paolo Menozzi and Alberto Piazza, Princeton University Press) there is no difference racially between the north and south Indians. This Study further confirmed that there is no race called an "Aryan" race.

As for the Aryan Invasion of India Theory, its main elements may be briefly summarised as follows. 1) The word Aryan refers to a racial group; the Aryans were a nomadic and light-skinned people. They were seen by some as being even barbaric at the time of their invasion of India. 2) The original home of the Aryans was outside India, in Central Asia or perhaps in some unknown land. They invaded India after 1900 BC in a series of invasions over a few centuries. Some give the date of 1500 BC as the time of their invasions. 3) The marauding Aryans destroyed an advanced civilization in the Indus Valley and imposed their language and culture. As has been stated, there is no racial group called "Aryans". The Vedic term *arya* was given such a connotation by European Indologists. With the new evidence from the Indus Valley excavations, even some Indian scholars and historians are frontally rejecting the Aryan race theory. Again though the Aryans are said to have invaded India from outside, there is surprisingly no reference in the Vedic literature to their "original home". As M.S. Elphinstone in his "History of India" (1814) wrote, "Even mythology goes no further than the Himalayas chain in which is fixed the habitation of the gods". The references in the Vedic literature to conflicts between the Aryas and the Dasyus or the presence of human skeletons at excavated sites do not prove conclusively anything, it is said, as regards an invasion or battles. Again new evidence shows that the Aryans cannot be held responsible for the destruction of the Indus Valley Civilization. It is now believed to be the result of drastic climatic changes including floods and droughts and the drying up of the Saraswati River. Even the date of their supposed invasion, if there was one, is also regarded as arbitrarily fixed.

For the past six years, the Archaeological Survey of India team led by R.S. Bisht has been excavating an Indus site called Dholavira on the marshes of the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat. What was uncovered has expressed itself in elaborate stone gateways with rounded columns apart from giant reservoirs for water. Bisht also found a board inlaid with large Indus script characters, probably the world's first hoarding. While experts regard Dholavira as an exciting find in recent times, archaeologists have excavated or are in the process of digging up ninety other

sites both in India and Pakistan. These are throwing up remarkable clues about this pre-historic civilization. Among them, that the name Indus Valley Civilization may now seem to be a misnomer, for in size, it was the largest pre-historic urban civilization. It encompassed 1.5 million sq. km., an area larger than Western Europe. Its geographical boundaries are now believed to extend up to the Iranian border on the west, Turkmenistan and Kashmir in the north, Delhi in the east and Godavari in the south. That empire was ruled much like a democracy and the Indus people were the world's greatest exporters. It was drastic climatic change resulting in the drying up of the Saraswati River that did them in and not the Aryans. M.Rafique Mughal, Pakistan's top-ranking archaeologist says, " It is both a revelation and a revolution. Our history textbooks need to be rewritten".

A recent count of the Indus sites showed as many as 1400 have been found of which 917 are in India, 481 in Pakistan and 1 in Afghanistan. While Harappa and Mohenjo-daro were regarded rightly as principal cities, there were several others such as Rakshigarhi in Haryana and Gamveriwala in Pakistan's Punjab. When the sites were plotted on a map, archaeologists noticed a curious clustering of sites along the Ghaggar River which flows through Haryana and Rajasthan and runs parallel to the Indus River. After entering Pakistan, where it is called Hakra, the river empties itself into the sea at Rann. What puzzled them was that the Ghaggar-Hakra River and most of its tributaries are dry and their courses have silted up. In the nineteen-eighties, Indian satellite images of the region showed that the ancient bed of the Ghaggar-Hakra could be tracked from the Siyaliks to the Rann of Kutch. Experts homed in on the Rigveda which is said to have been composed when the Indus Civilization was in decline. Many of the hymns therein mention a sacred river called Saraswati. Putting together the evidence, V.N.Mishra ( Director, Department of Archaeology, Deccan College, Pune) concluded that the Ghaggar-Hakra was the Vedic Saraswati River. It is well known that in the Rigveda the honour of the greatest and holiest river was bestowed not on the Ganges but on the Saraswati, once a mighty river flowing all the way from the Himalayas to the ocean across the Rajasthan desert. Extensive research has shown that this river has changed course several times, going completely dry around 1900 BC. It had ceased to be a perennial river before 3000 BC as seen from the latest satellite images combined with on-field archaeological studies. Thus according to N.S.Rajaram, " This means that the Rigveda describes the geography of north India long before 3000 BC. All this shows that the Rigveda must have been in existence no later than 3500 BC ".

An objective analysis of the archaeological data from the excavated Indus sites in the last couple of years has led to a serious challenge to the validity of the Aryan Invasion theory by a number of Indian scholars and historians. Some of them have now outrightly discarded that theory as false. The most odd aspect of the theory is that it has had its origins not in any Indian records but in the writings of European Indologists. At the same time, as has been already pointed out, several ethnologists and sociologists had discarded the Aryan race theory by categorising the primary races of the world as being Negroid, Australoid, Caucasian and Mongoloid. They also place the northern and southern Indians in the same sub-branch of Mediterraneans in the Caucasian Group. With the rejection of the Aryan Invasion theory , it is now claimed by Indian scholars that the present-day Indians are the descendants of the same people who had lived in the Indus Valley in ancient times. The Harvard anthropologist Richard Meadows who made an extensive study of the skeletal remains in the region showed that there was a diverse mix of population in the past just as at present. The new evidence, at the same time, sees a unity in such diversity both then and now. Thus it is argued that the northern and southern Indians are racially one and the same people, as also seen by the ethnologists. Despite some deviations which account for the diversity ranging from light-skin to dark-skin people, racially they all belong to the same sub-branch of Mediterraneans. Not only is there thus no ethnic divide between the peoples of India, it is now claimed that there is no religious divide between North and South India. For it is now being stated that Siva worship is not alien to Vedic culture nor is it only confined to the Dravidian south. As may be observed, the most important symbols of Saivism are found in North India. Thus Kasi (Benares) in the north is the most revered and holiest seat of the Saivites. Again the abode of Siva is in Mount Kailash in the Himalayan Range. So Siva is not only a Dravidian God and by no means only a non-Vedic God.

More significantly what flows from the rejection of the Aryan Invasion Theory is that Sanskrit which was supposed to be a language introduced by the Aryans must now stand on its own. If no Aryans came to India, then it follows that Sanskrit was not introduced by them. This has led to a new approach to the deciphering of the Indus Script. As has been mentioned earlier, Natwar Jha in his book "Vedic Glossary on Indus Seals" claims to have cracked the undeciphered Indus Script. Jha has proposed that the script is that of the Indus Valley people who were the ancestors of the people who live in India today.

Accepting this point of view, he proceeded on the assumption that the ancient seals are in an ancient form of Sanskrit and demonstrates not only a correlation between the Indus script and other ancient scripts but also produces a key to the reading of the Indus script. Again B.B. Lal in his book, "The Earliest Civilization of South Asia" points out that the sites in Kalibangan, for instance, were ruined around 1900 BC due to the drying up of the Saraswati River. The Vedas (Hindu Scriptures) must therefore be before that time. Hence he argues that Sanskrit probably existed 2000 years before 1900 BC given the fact that it takes two millenniums for a language to originate and develop to a level of versifying and composition in metres. Thus he seeks to establish the origin and antiquity of Sanskrit as a language of the Indus Valley without any external "Aryan" factor. Again it is pointed out, even if we assume for a moment that Sanskrit was introduced by the Aryans, it would be inconceivable that a nomadic, nay even barbaric tribe such as the Aryan invaders would have been capable of such sublime thoughts and words of wisdom as embodied in the Vedic Scriptures. It is thus clear that the Vedic Scriptures which represent the fountain-head of Indian thought and culture could only have been an Indian product. As pointedly stated by G.Slater, "A study of the Vedas (Hindu Scriptures) reveals the fact that Vedic culture itself is so redolent of the Indian soil and of the Indian atmosphere that the idea of a non-Indian origin of that culture is totally absurd." And as M.S. Elphinstone says, "There is no reason whatever for thinking that the Hindus ever inhabited any country but their present one".

According to the advocates of the Aryan Invasion of India theory, the Indus Valley Civilization is only 4000-5000 years old. The end of this civilization is placed between 1900-1500 BC. They thus propose the period of 1400-1300 BC as the beginning of the Vedic Age. The Ramayana and Mahabharata are dated 1200-1000 BC. This chronology of pre-historic India was first proposed by Max Mueller based on his firm belief in the Biblical date of the creation of the world i.e 23 October 4004 BC. On the basis of the new evidence as seen from Vedic testimonies, Puranic references, archaeological finds etc, a new chronology of the pre-historic period of India is now being put forward. These show that though the Indus Valley Civilization peaked between 2600-1900 BC, there was a continuity seen with the earlier cultures of the region. As mentioned earlier, recent archaeological evidence especially from Mehrgarh has established that the Indus Civilization was essentially an indigenous development growing out of local cultures in an unbroken sequence from neolithic through chalcolithic to

early Harappan (circa 3600-2600) and Mature Harappan or Indus Civilization (2600-1900 BC) when it collapsed into regional cultures. Again the discovery of the city of Dwarka not only establishes the authenticity of the Mahabharata war and the main events described in the epic but also clinches the traditional antiquity of the Mahabharata and Ramayana periods. Thus the new chronology proposed by these scholars of India's pre-historic past is as follows:

- 4000 BC	Vedic Age
3750 BC	End of Vedic Age
3000 BC	End of Ramayana/Mahabharata Period
3000-2000 BC	Development of Saraswati/Indus Civilization
2200-1900 BC	Decline of Saraswati/Indus Civilization
2000-1500 BC	Period of Complete Chaos and Migration
1400- 250 BC	Period of Evolution of Syncretic Hindu Culture

What the new theory proposed by these scholars seeks to establish is that the Vedic Age was around 4000 BC instead of only 1400 BC; that it led to the Saraswati / Indus Civilization and the undeciphered Indus Script is old Sanskrit. Some see this as an attempt by these scholars to challenge the Dravidian basis of India's pre-historic past. There are however many questions left unanswered and chronologically many events cannot be reconciled. For even if the undeciphered Indus Script for argument's sake is shown to be old Sanskrit, it would not explain the remnants of the old Dravidian dialects/language which continue to survive in the region even today. Besides as observed by Dr Maclean, "there is little doubt that the Dravidian languages are comparatively older in point of time than Sanskrit". Recent evidence as reported says that the earliest form of writing has been uncovered at the ancient site of Harappa. Harvard researchers date the primitive symbols, akin to the later Indus script to be 5,500 years ago and observe that it predates any Egyptian or Sumerian writing. Again as seen earlier, there is a pervasive sub-stratum of Dravidian influence on old Sanskrit. The presence of Dravidian loan-words in the Rigveda is now well recognised. Though there are links between the Dravidian language and old Sanskrit, it only shows the influence that the Dravidian language had on Sanskrit. As Professor Rhys Davids observed the Dravidian language did influence the development of Sanskrit. In his words, "The Dravidian dialects affected profoundly the sounds, the structure, the idiom and the vocabulary of Sanskrit". But despite this, in the view of many linguists, Sanskrit is quite an independent language vis-à-vis the Dravidian languages as pointed out earlier.

One could therefore safely conclude that it was a language introduced by tribes or peoples who entered India from outside. Again Sanskrit is placed in the Indo-European group of languages.

As for the Aryan Invasion theory, it too needs to be modified. Even before the new evidence came to light, it was seen that the Aryan influx was not a single concerted action but one covering several centuries and involving many tribes perhaps not all of the same race and language. The end of the Saraswati/Indus civilisation was due to a host of factors foremost perhaps was the decadence of the civilisation due to drastic climatic change. Hence it may not be correct to speak of an Aryan invasion as such. As K.M.Panikkar had observed, "They (the Aryans) entered India not as invaders but as peaceful emigrants with their flock of cattle, their household goods and gods". They soon came into conflict with the people living in fortified areas under their kings and chiefs. The Rigveda itself speaks of a hundred pillared forts of the enemies. Many of the hymns of the Vedas are addressed to the gods for assistance in fighting these enemies. It is significant that the high god of the Vedas, Indra is described as "Purandara", shaker of cities. Again the people who created the Indus civilisation were without doubt urban and commercial; while the tribes that entered India were a nomadic/pastoral people. As K.M.Panikkar concludes, this is yet "another example of the recurring fact in history that decaying civilisations whatever their material advancement cannot stand up to barbarian invasions". It is thus clear that the tribes that entered India and referred to as Aryans came from the outside; they cannot be regarded as indigenous people.

The same can be said about Siva, that he is a pre-Vedic deity, given the antiquity of Siva and Siva worship. It existed from the earliest of times in India, long before the Vedic Age. As observed by Srinivasa Iyengar, there is ample evidence to show that the worship of Siva in the form of the Lingam existed in the Stone Age which certainly preceded the Vedic Age. Again the worship of Siva and the Lingam is now seen as a more widespread cult from ancient times. It has been a cult found not only in the whole of India, but was also in parts of Africa, Middle East, the Mediterranean and many other places. Hence it was there for the last ten thousand years or more, much earlier than from the time of the Indus Civilization. Thus Siva statues found in Anatolia in Turkey are said to be BC 6000 years old ; so too the bones in samadhi pose of burials in the Mediterranean countries. It is therefore clear that Siva was a pre-Vedic deity. Hence the acceptance of Siva in the Vedas was a subsequent development.

Again the essential features of Hinduism as we know it today were present in the Indus civilisation. As Sir John Marshall observed after examining the religious articles found at the Indus sites, "There is enough in the fragments we have recovered to demonstrate that.... this religion of the Indus people was the lineal progenitor of Hinduism". In fact Siva and Kali, the worship of Lingam and other features of popular Hinduism were well established in India before the coming of the Aryans. It is also important to note the change in the Aryan attitude to the Lingam and the God it symbolises. In the Rigveda, we have the significant statement, " Let those whose deity is the Lingam not penetrate our sanctuary". This fear of the Lingam worshippers is replaced in the later Yajur Veda by its recognition in the official ritual, the Lingam finding its place even in the Aswamedha. Obviously the pastoral Aryans who slowly overcame the indigenous people assimilated their culture and civilisation including Hinduism. And as K.M.Panikkar concludes, " The clearest evidence of this fact is the gradual disappearance of the Aryan gods in the post-Vedic civilisation". The system which evolved through contact between the Aryans and the indigenous people is a synthesis in which while the thought forms of the conquerors predominated, the thought and tradition of the indigenous Dravidian peoples found new expression. Hence the doctrine of the Aryan origin of Hinduism equally needs at the same time to be greatly modified. The pre-eminence conceded to the Rigveda had however a significant effect. As K.M.Panikkar observes, "It gave to the thought forms of India.....a Vedic framework and thereby kept up the fiction of an Aryan India".

As for the peoples of India, the new theory again by denying an Aryan invasion of India, only establishes the fact that India today is predominantly Dravidian in its ethnicity. As pointed out by Dr G. Slater, "the Dravidian element today preponderates over all other elements in the racial make-up of the people of India". As seen earlier, the Dravidians were regarded as a branch of the Mediterranean race. Modern ethnologists confirm this by placing the Indians from the north as well as the south in a sub-branch of Mediterraneans in the broad Caucasian group. The deviations between the dark-skinned southern Indians and the light-skinned northern Indians are explained as due to some inter-breeding by the former with the pre-Dravidian Negroid / Australoid tribes who had occupied India earlier, as well as to changes in their respective habitats. Hence despite the diversity seen in the peoples of India today, there is a basic unity which stems from their common Mediterranean ancestry. The rejection totally of an Aryan invasion of India would only serve to further reinforce this

fact. But as pointed out earlier, the coming of the nomadic tribes did not alter the basic character of the Indian people. As observed by K.M. Panikkar, Vedic Aryans were confined to the Punjab. The Jumna and the Ganges are mentioned but the geographical expansion of the Aryans did not extend further East. Since there was no further migration of the Aryans, the theory cannot be maintained that the rest of the country came gradually to be peopled by the Aryans. The expansion from the Punjab was that of a civilisation which had been evolved and which came to be known as Aryan but was predominantly that of the conquered Dravidian peoples. Hence what the new evidence shows is that there is a basic Dravidian character to India's population, despite its outward diversity.

The first direct evidence of civilisation in India, as we know it today, comes from the Saraswati / Indus Valley. The culture it discloses is essentially urban and commercial, hence pre-Aryan and pre-Vedic. One thing is certain and can no longer be contested... *civilisation did not come to India with the Aryans*. This doctrine of the Aryan origin of Indian civilisation which finds no support in Indian literature is the result of the theories of the "Indo-Germanic" scholars who held that everything valuable in the world originated from the Aryans. Not only is Indian civilisation pre-Vedic, but the essential features of the Hindu religion as we know it today were present much earlier and in the later Saraswati/Indus civilisation. The Aryans assimilated this civilisation. Nothing demonstrates so clearly the gulf between the Hindu civilisation that existed and the pastoral Aryan tribes than the synthesis which emerged resulting in the death of the Vedic gods. The transformation came early enough. The same rituals may be performed; the same Gayatri chanted. And sacrifices are performed to Indra even now for rain. But neither Agni (fire) nor Mitra (sun) nor even Indra is recognised as having divine powers. The Vedic gods died soon after the Aryans overcame the Dasyus and were reborn as minor figures. The pre-Vedic deities Siva, Vishnu and Durga took their place in an elaborate Hindu mythology. Thus Indian history from the beginning is of necessity, predominantly the history of the Hindu people. For what is distinctly Indian has so far been Hindu. As K.M. Panikkar sums up, "In essence, ...the history of Indian effort towards the building-up and maintenance of a specially Indian civilisation has to be the history of the Hindu mind and its achievements".

Given the fact that the word "Aryan" can no longer refer to a race or language, this would have profound implications for Lanka's ancient history. As shown,

the Aryan Invasion of India theory which is now being increasingly challenged particularly by Indian scholars and historians based on the new evidence needs to be modified. It is clear that there was no Aryan race as has been shown. It follows therefore that if there were no Aryans, no Aryans came to India. The nomadic/pastoral tribes that entered India and who are referred to as Aryans for want of a better name are no Aryans. If ethnically there were no Indo-Aryans, it follows that none could have come to Lanka. The claim of those Sri Lankan historians of a Indo-Aryan descent for the Sinhala people which had no historical basis even earlier, now has its bottom completely knocked out. The continuing insistence therefore on an Aryan descent is nothing more than a myth. As for the Sanskrit language, though it yet continues to be referred to as an Aryan language, it should more appropriately be said to belong to the Indo-European family of languages. Despite the fact that it was influenced considerably by the Dravidian language after its introduction into India by the nomadic tribes, it is rightly regarded however as an independent language and opposed to Tamil, the premier Dravidian language. Professor Julien Vinson who compared the two languages observed that, "their grammatical systems so widely differ that they certainly proceed from quite different origins". Hence Sanskrit which has some similarities to some European languages can appropriately be placed in the family of Indo-European languages. But the same cannot be said about Sinhala. As has been shown, there has been a considerable Tamil influence on the vocabulary, idiom and grammatical structure of Sinhala. As far as Sinhala goes, as observed by Gate-Mudaliyar Gunawardene, "its evolution too appears to have been on a Tamil basis for it is dominated to a considerable extent by the principles of Tamil grammar and by Tamil idioms". Clearly the classification applicable to the Sinhala language is not Indo-European but Indo-Dravidian.

What these revelations from the Indus Valley Civilization show are that there is, as in India's case, a need for Sri Lanka's historians to re-examine the basis of the ancient history of Lanka. Pre-history is an increasingly important aspect of our understanding of the growth of human settlements in the island and of the process of ethnic formation. What may be termed as the Pre-Vijayan era becomes an integral and important part of Sri Lankan history. In the light of the new evidence and Sri Lanka's own antiquities, there is a compelling need to focus on our pre-history. It would enable a discussion of the historical beginnings of the Sinhala people as a distinct ethnos, whatever their origins and whatever ethnic groups and cultural elements went into their undoubtedly

composite formation. A study of early Sri Lankan history, stripped of its myths and distortions and free of bias can do just that. Our history textbooks would have to be re-written as well.

#### Some References:

- 1) **The Aryan Invasion Theory and Indian Nationalism** by Shrikant Talageri (1993)
- 2) **Vedic Aryans and Origins of Civilization** by N.S. Rajaram and David Frawley (1995)
- 3) **Aryan Invasion of India: the Myth and the Truth** by N.S. Rajaram
- 4) **Vedic Glossary on Indus Seals** by Natwar Jha (1997)
- 5) **The Earliest Civilization of South Asia** by B.B.Lal (1997)



#### NOTES

#### INTRODUCTION

1. Charles Pridham, "A Historical, Political and Statistical Account of Ceylon and its Dependencies" as quoted from S. Arumugam's, "Thiruketeeswaram", p 8.
2. mythical. The Vijaya of legend is referred to as the mythical Vijaya; this is seen as a pure myth without any historical basis.
3. The last all-island Official Census of Sri Lanka was taken in 1981.
4. M. Karunanidhi (Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu) at a cultural gathering in Kuala Lumpur in January 1999.
5. G.C.Mendis, "Early History of Ceylon", p 14.
6. S. Arasaratnam, "Ceylon", p 121.
7. S. Pathmanathan, "The Kingdom of Jaffna", p 2.

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2. Ananda K Coomaraswamy, "The Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon", p 38.
3. S. Casie Chitty, "History of Jaffna", as quoted from C. Rasanayagam's "Ancient Jaffna" p 86-87.
4. M.S. Purnalingam Pillai, "Ravana, the Great King of Lanka", p 81.
5. C.S. Navaratnam, "Tamils and Ceylon", p 39.
6. P. Arunachalam, "Sketches of Ceylon History", p 12.
7. C. Rasanayagam, "Ancient Jaffna", p 177.
8. ibid, p 177.
9. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, "History of South India", p 87.
10. M.S. Purnalingam Pillai, ibid, p 84.
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12. C. Rasanayagam, ibid, p 102.
13. Mahavamsa VI, p 58.
14. P. Arunachalam, ibid, p 10.
15. Bishop R. Caldwell, "A History of Tinnevelly", p 9.
16. H.W. Codrington, "A Short History of Ceylon", p 1.
17. C.S. Navaratnam, "A Short History of Hinduism in Ceylon", p 195.
18. S. Paranavitana, "Sinhala, Ceylon", pp 8-9.

- 19.C.Rasanayagam, *ibid*, p 105.
- 20.B.C.Law, "On the Chronicles of Ceylon", p 49.
- 21.S.Paranavitana, *ibid*, pp 8-9.
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\*AES=Asian Educational Services.



